THE WINDOW

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CHAPTER I

i

WHEN from the windows of the boat train Christopher Royle saw England again, he felt himself suddenly a creature of melodrama and the quest which he had imposed upon himself an anomaly.

It was perhaps, he thought, the trim, cultivated beauty running past him, the little fields, luxuriant and snugly hedged, the woods, pale with an enchanting loveliness in the soft, ambient air, while here and there behind them rose the gray towers of some old manor with its attendant village and flock of cozy farms about it, that gave one this illusion of a world far removed from the rough passions of men. For illusion it was, he knew, passion being after all the force that moves the world like an electric, secret current, . . . moves it to tragedy or glory, to enterprise, exile, life, ruin or death. Yes, it would be moving here as elsewhere, this current, but decorously and not with the violence of the untamed places from which he had come home.

Christopher fingered the packet of diamonds, which for safety he carried on his person, and thought of the man whose strange gift they were, a man he had known only in the last hours of his life.

He could see him yet as he had come lurching into his camp that night, flushed with fever, marked by Death and worse, yet about him still a certain charm, a quality; and charm one may suspect in a man, but quality goes deeper. It was there in the hands, calloused but slender and strong; in the unshaven, ravished face with the thin, sensitive nostrils and eyes set wide apart and slightly tilted so that they looked out at one with a young impudent daredeviltry that would never grow old, and yet could blaze or smile appealingly.

Christopher had never seen him before, didn't know him from Adam, yet afterwards when he had heard everything Hatherley had to tell about him . . . or all that he could not prevent his telling . . . he still felt he knew the poor chap better than that.

"A weak, reckless young waster, Jim Robertson," had been Hatherley's bitter summing up, but Christopher could have written a book on the making of prodigals, knowing how much of blind Fate and the insensibility of men may go to it, and Hatherley himself already stood accused by the few conscious words of a dying man.

"I'm done, old boy," he had gasped, with that queer smile of his, as Christopher helped him to lie

down and brought him a drink. Then fumbling in his belt he had produced the packet of diamonds and an old wallet and thrust them into his hands.

"Keep 'em. . . . I give 'em to you," he said. "Only swear you won't let that swine Hatherley lay his hands upon them."

Christopher, instinctively agreeing with this description of the other man, had promised, but to a poor chap already too far gone to hear him or heed.

Towards dawn, when his guest would wake no more, he had opened the packet and stared in amazement at its contents. He knew nothing of the value of such things, but guessed it to be considerable. Pitiful, he thought, to die like that out here in the wilds with riches in your hand. Then, remembering his promise, he had stuffed them away in safety, for Hatherley being nabob of the district must be informed of Robertson's death. There would be formalities; and of the gems and the wallet he must get no hint.

Christopher had opened the wallet more reluctantly, feeling it indecent somehow with their owner lying there, then smiled at the folly of the thought. For this too had been a gift and must contain therefore no secrets that he should not see.

It contained indeed little enough, he found . . . a chit or two, some rough accounts, a bundle of newspaper cuttings relating to ivory, and a letter old and worn with much folding. He glanced at this, then hid it away with the diamonds, for here

at least was something. It had been written by a girl in November, 1918, to a man at the front and it began "Dear Terry."

ii

Hatherley after all had been easy to deceive, for in his blind contempt for the man who called himself Robertson, he had not suspected him of the possession of more than a couple of rupees to knock together. He went, with the gusto of his kind, through the dead man's effects, finding nothing of consequence.

"Been hanging about this country for years," he said, with the scorn of the official who goes Home every year or so at Government expense towards one for whom Governments would have neither use nor approval. "Not that he has been in my district for some time. I saw to that. But I've heard of him and his doings now and then and precious little to his credit. Never even had a remittance as far as anybody knows. No people evidently, or if he has he's been dead to them for a good many years. They are better dead, his sort."

Christopher, knowing from experience how far from just the judgments of the Just may be, smiled grimly, thinking that the discovery of the diamonds would have been a considerable shock to Hatherley; but even so, he would have suspected them of being stolen, no doubt as, for all their present owner knew to the contrary, they might be.

Nevertheless he had continued his journey to the

Coast carrying his possibly guilty secret with a light heart. As riches the gift meant nothing to him personally, though any time for years past it might have meant so much, for that is the irony of life. Christopher Royle was going home to his own inheritance. His brother Herbert was dead without heirs, so that all his bitter enmity to the younger man had not been able to prevent his triumphing at last.

The feud between them, unspoken, subtle, had grown from boyhood to manhood out of temperamental differences too great for any common understanding. Always the crafty rectitude of the elder had been able by some diabolical means to put the younger in the wrong, with his parents, his friends, his world. After his father's death, with Herbert smugly installed at Windyhill, married and likely to have sons, he had gone abroad, knowing that even this, a sane proceeding since his income was small and the prospect of work in post-war England dubious, would be made to seem, by innuendo, somehow a disgrace.

Out of his own experience therefore Christopher felt himself linked in understanding with this outcast Jim Robertson, who had been called Terry long ago. Reading the girl's letter had quickened his interest too for it gave at least some hint of the other's story. And as the ship carried him home to England and his own better fortune, he began to wonder how, once there with leisure and means at his command, he might trace it further . . . oh,

carefully, of course . . . and perhaps rehabilitate the memory of the other man.

It was less a romantic gesture than a desire to get even with a world which men in their blindness so often make hell for one another.

But now he was in England and the rich Devon fields had given place to the lanes of Somerset and presently he would catch a glimpse of Windyhill and the far acres of his home. That at least had been a romantic impulse . . . to leave the ship at Plymouth instead of going round by sea, just for the sight of it all as the train raced by.

And there it was, by Jove . . . the old gray house, square set in its half circle of protecting trees, and beautiful with an enduring beauty that caught his heart in the realization of his own immense good fortune. Windyhill was his, a thing he had never dreamt might come to pass, even in his boyhood, when the secret love of it grew day by day into a nature as sensitive to beauty as it was repressed.

The train had passed but it did not matter. Clear in his mind was every stone and corner of it . . . the old square hall, deep-raftered, perfectly proportioned, the staircase, shallow and wide, its balustrades carved by some artist of a forgotten age, the mullioned windows looking on a drive that wound with grace through terraced gardens to the very heart of the village set below the hill. And here was a market place centuries old and there the Norman church, where carved in marble lay the first Royle of Windyhill.

To the right across the fields lay Windy Farm where Pollock and his lads, Fergus and John, had had always a warm welcome for the young Christopher. Fergus, poor chap, had died in France, but John would be nearing thirty, and old Pollock working and planning as usual, season in and season out. A bit of a genius at farming, Pollock, full of ideas which the Governor, Conservative to the teeth, had resisted every time. Well, old Pollock should have his head now. Between them they would make Windy the farm of his dreams.

Paddington at last and four o'clock. Too late perhaps to go back to Somerset this evening. Better see the lawyers and get it over . . . then Windyhill in the morning. He called a taxi, ordered the hood down and drove through London with the unequalled zest of one who comes from the wilderness back to the world.

This world had changed, of course, but he did not see that all at once, absorbed in looking for familiar landmarks. Here was the Quadriga, incomparable, he had always thought it, that figure, waiting

". . . to outstrip the wind
And leave the breezes of the morn behind."

And there, as he swept along the Mall, was old Nelson, a slim silhouette above the Admiralty Arch.

It had been Trafalgar Day when he left London and the hero had looked down through blinding rain upon a wealth of flowers. And Christopher remem-

bered thinking what hypocrites we are, because the same nation which put Nelson on a pedestal and yearly hangs it with garlands in remembrance, yet neglected his last trust and left the woman he adored to starve.

"Damned lot of hypocrites," he had cried angrily then, but time had modified the view. "Poor fools," he thought, "understanding so precious little of each other."

iii

Christopher's arrival at the offices of Ponder and James in Lincoln's Inn caused a flutter of dismay. The heir to a dignified estate should not turn up unheralded like any Dick, Tom or Harry, Mr. Ponder's look of pained astonishment seemed to say. The old boy hadn't changed a bit, except that he looked more than ever owl-like in his horn-rimmed spectacles. And quite right, too, thought Christopher, pleased at this appropriate embellishment, for if a lawyer isn't owl-like, what on earth, he asked himself, should he be?

"You did not write us, surely, Mr. Royle?" said pained Mr. Ponder, as though his memory were not quite clear upon the point.

Christopher explained that postal facilities had been few in his neighborhood and that any letter he might have written could only have traveled by the same steamer which brought him to England.

"But a cable perhaps?"

Mr. Ponder's tone was suave. He had not for-

gotten that Christopher was now the head of the house of Royle, but in spite of his urbanity, some hint emerged that he thought it a pity, and once again the young man felt himself in the presence of the antagonism with which his whole life at home had been beset.

"You have at least no doubt let your sister-in-law know of your impending arrival," added Mr. Ponder brightening, as one who wishes to believe the best.

"Adelaide? Good lord, no. I imagined you would have heard, sir, that I have had little communication with the family for the last six or seven years. I hardly think she would be interested in my movements even if I had known where to find her."

"She is still, of course, at Windyhill," said the lawyer.

"Eh?" Christopher was startled.

"Until we heard your wishes in the matter, naturally," proceeded Mr. Ponder. "It was necessary that the estate should be looked after and Mrs. Royle kindly consented to remain pending advice from you. You might have wished, for instance, to remain abroad . . . er . . . indefinitely."

Christopher felt himself flushing with sudden rage.

"Do you happen to know why I went abroad?" he enquired in a level tone.

"Oh, certainly not. I was to a large extent in your late brother's confidence, but not of course in matters of a private family nature."

"Private family nature be damned!" said Christopher furiously. "I went to earn my living and if any other reason has been suggested it was a lie."

"Calm yourself, my dear Mr. Christopher, calm yourself," begged Mr. Ponder, flustered. "No such suggestion has been made I assure you. Your explanation is of course the obvious one, and considering the economic state of England after the War, I consider it was a most judicious move on your part . . . most judicious."

Christopher calmed himself, but less from inclination than because he felt how impossible it was to break through the other's battery of words to the real antagonism behind. Always with the people of his brother's world, it was there . . . the subtle suggestion that he was somehow culpable.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," he shrugged, "but since it is no longer a question of pounds, shillings and pence, I shall naturally live in England. As for the estate, surely Harrison could have looked after that without troubling my sister-in-law to put herself out by staying."

"Er . . . quite." Mr. Ponder took off his glasses and polished them with care. "Harrison, however, your brother found, was not sufficiently up-to-date for the needs of the place, and he parted with him some years ago. The present steward is Mrs. Royle's brother, young Mr. Felix Woollf, who has done excellently in the position, I understand.

"Your brother," continued Mr. Ponder, "thought, and no doubt you will agree with him, that it is always best when possible to employ a relative in a rather confidential capacity of that kind."

"On the contrary, I disagree with him on that as on every other subject," said Christopher bluntly, rising to his feet.

"Oh, come . . . come! *De mortuis,* you know, my dear sir."

"Damn *de mortuis!*" said Christopher violently. He felt rather like a small boy defying the Head, but he didn't care.

"I'd better see them," he said.

"Yes, yes, an excellent idea." Mr. Ponder was clearly glad to be rid of the responsibility. "You will be delighted with the estate I know. In splendid order . . . never better. And when you are ready to go into matters generally I need hardly tell you we are at your disposal," added Mr. Ponder generously. "One day next week, shall we say?"

"Thanks. I'll let you know."

Christopher went out from the lawyer's presence with a feeling of defeat. The whole interview in retrospect annoyed him intensely, his own part in it in particular. What a fool he was to let these sneaking undercurrents move him. And his clothes were all wrong. He should have thought of that. It put a man at a disadvantage somehow. As for the crafty Adelaide hanging on and waiting to be ejected, it was a beastly business. She might, he thought, have had better taste than that.

iv

He did not after all go to Somerset next day, but to his tailor, so that when the time came for the visit of ejection, as he called it to himself, he was at least impeccably clad. Adelaide, advised of his coming, sent a car to meet him, a shining monster, far too opulent, in his opinion.

"You are new to me," he said with a pleasant nod to the young chauffeur.

"Yes, sir. I've been at the House come a twelvemonth. Pollock's my name."

Christopher, smiling at the old village designation of his home, exclaimed:

"Not one of the Pollocks of the farm, surely?"

"Oh, no, sir. No relation. Pollocks from the farm, they've emigrated, two year back, I believe."

"Good God!"

"Yes, sir. The late master had a bit of trouble getting them out, I'm told. Rare obstinate that old Pollock was. There's a gentleman farming Windy now, a friend of Mr. Woollf's."

Pollocks gone from Windy . . . Pollocks who from generation to generation had loved and tended it. It would break the old man's heart. He must be brought back at any cost. It was unthinkable. It was ghastly.

Innately gentle where women were concerned, he had dreaded the coming interview with Adelaide, but this was the last straw.

Pollocks gone from Windy? His mouth shut in a grim line. Christopher Royle rode forth to battle.

CHAPTER II

i

IN the end Christopher gave Adelaide another month at Windyhill, not very gracefully perhaps, since it was hard that Herbert should have died at forty leaving no heir; but the tragedy of old Pollock was still too fresh in his mind and too immense; and her poor pretense of having stayed on so long merely on his account annoyed him, she who, when he was the underdog, had never even troubled to tolerate him as a guest.

What a bachelor would do alone in a great place like Windyhill, Adelaide said insinuatingly, she didn't know.

"Unless of course you are married," she added, and in the darting glance of her clever eyes, he saw her all ready to class his hypothetical bride as undesirable.

"Not at the moment," answered Christopher, with a malicious desire to keep her guessing. Hang it all, he wasn't sending her homeless into the world. She had a good income and a place in town. He would not have her running his house and lording it over him.

"Then you'll stay now you're here, won't you?"

said Adelaide, brightening, "and as soon as I can manage it, I'll get away."

"Possession nine points of the law, eh?" thought Christopher and shook his head.

"No thanks. I'll wait until you can get out."

"Really," said Adelaide, annoyed. "You are very peculiar, Christopher, and very foolish. I have a great many friends in the County and you won't find much favor among them by treating me like this."

Christopher grinned.

"But favor is deceitful and beauty is vain," he quoted.

"Oh, poetry!"

"Yes, lot of poetry in the Old Testament."

It was too bad, he supposed, to catch her out like that, and, seeing her stormy look, he added: "You see how badly we get on, and why on earth, when there are already so many unpleasant things in life, should you want to live in the same house with somebody you detest?"

"Oh, well, if you are determined to be inimical. . . ."

"At close quarters absolutely. At a distance no doubt I shall be able to curb my hate. I'll do my best."

Christopher's smile was faintly wistful and if she had laughed his long resentment might have melted away, but Adelaide instead stalked from the room.

There was further unpleasantness about getting the new man Field away from Windy Farm, and

young Felix Woollf, already sore at receiving his own marching orders, was inclined to be high-handed.

"I'd like to know what the law would have to say about it," said Felix, hotly.

"Very well, if your friend wishes to go to law, I'm ready," said Christopher. "I am offering him fair compensation, and if it comes to that the law may have a few bright remarks to make about turning out an old stock like the Pollocks who have been farming Windy for two hundred years."

"Of course if you choose to go into Court and throw mud at your own brother's memory . . ."

"Then you admit," Christopher calmly caught him up, "that it was a dirty trick?"

Young Woollf, much to his own surprise, began to revise his opinion of the new owner.

"Look here, Mr. Royle," he said impulsively and with unexpected humor, "I daresay it does look to you as though the whole place had been chucked to the wolves, but I give you my word I had nothing to do with this, though Field is a friend of mine. Your brother and Pollock had a big bust up before I ever came here. Herbert had his knife into the old man properly."

Christopher nodded.

"Into me too," he said, faintly smiling. "All right, my boy, I don't blame you, but you can understand that I want to run the place in my own way. I'll tell you what. Persuade Field to go reasonably soon and I'll add a hundred to your cheque."

"Decent of you," said the young Woollf, and the two shook hands.

ii

"And now what?" Christopher asked himself, going back to town.

He had been able to obtain Pollock's address in Canada and would write to the old man that night, he thought. To-morrow he would see the lawyers again, but after that there would still be a month of exile before Windyhill would be free of the wolves.

Felix had won him by a phrase for, hang it all, he said to himself, you can't help liking a chap who can make a joke with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune falling thick and fast. He would have to keep a friendly eye on Felix and lend him a hand if necessary. Odd how just once in a while you can get to know a fellow in a moment.

Christopher was reminded by this thought of Robertson and that vague clew he had intended to follow up one day. And here were occupation and interest for the month ahead.

The letter from the dead man's wallet was in his pocketbook and he took it out and read it through again. It was dated from a woman's club in London, and while suggesting several things, it gave him little enough to go upon.

"Dear Terry," it ran,

"Your letter came this morning and I took a few hours off and went to see her at once. She was

suspicious at first but, when she found I came from you, she could hardly bear to let me go. She is very pretty and very frightened, poor child, but quite well and comfortable, and the people in the house seem kind. Of course I will look after her, in fact after them both when the time comes. Don't worry too much, though if you could wangle leave, even for a couple of days, it would do her more good than anything.

"I was at Dorne for a few minutes on Sunday and found them all well. Your mother was in high feather, having dreamt you had won the V.C.

"Take care of yourself, old man. I'll write again as soon as there is any news.

"Yours ever,

"PAT."

"The V.C., eh?" thought Christopher without cynicism. "Poor old chap."

He liked this letter; he felt he could like the girl who had written it, for it was clear she had had a delicate mission and she had fulfilled it calmly and without a fuss. Not even a hint of reproach or censure and Christopher approved of that, for who was she, or who are any of us to judge a man in the heat and uproar of such a time? She would stand by him, by both of them, by all three, if three there were . . . that was the gist of it, and here was a use for the diamonds possibly. For if, as seemed likely, Terry Jim Robertson had given a hostage to Misfortune, said Christopher whimsically to himself, hard cash might help to pacify the jade.

After all, if the search proved hopeless or injudicious, he could give it up, but at least it would take him into summer England, which seemed fairer to him than London at the moment. For all his passion for it, he knew that London is the city of kindred spirits . . . no place for a lonely man; and he was lonely. Most of his friends were scattered far and wide in the aftermath of war, and coming home he had known he would have to build his life anew.

He planned to find Dorne first, if possible, and work backwards from there, seeing and hearing as much as might be, or very likely nothing at all.

"For I daresay this is all a tale," he thought, "and I'm a crazy fool. Most of us are, if it comes to that."

He searched next day in gazetteer and railway guide, but could find no town or village named Dorne in either. A postal directory however contained two, a Dorne Welling in Yorkshire and Dorne-on-Severn, Gloucestershire. Yorkshire he thought too far away, for the girl, Pat, had been in London and would hardly speak in that casual way of spending a few minutes at Dorne.

Dorne-on-Severn! He found the name attractive, and there might be fishing, which would give him a pretext for spending a few days in the place. He decided to buy a car, rods and tackle, and set out without delay.

CHAPTER III

i

PATRICIA EDEN walked over the fields to Dorne one summer morning, with a feeling of pleased excitement. She was thirty, but she looked a girl, unconsciously however, which is the best way for any woman to retain her youth. Patricia rarely thought of her age, but this neglect of a distressful subject was unconscious too, there being other and more urgent problems to engross her.

The field path was embroidered on each side with daisies, standing tall and still among the grasses, but she liked better the golden sea of buttercups that was the Rectory meadow, with the dark splendor of the woods beside it, shutting off the Manor inviolate from the common gaze.

"Particularly from my gaze," she thought, with humor, "and Michael's." (But there was no humor in the second thought.)

She cut through the churchyard, past the bright lances of Mary Winter's herbaceous border and into the Rectory, where at a window Mrs. Winter was doing accounts and getting them wrong as usual.

"Which shows my vocation," she always said, "for no one capable of getting them right would be the wife of a mere country rector. Not that I

shouldn't have married you just the same," she would console her husband, "but, being clever, I should have converted you into a Bishop, Austin."

"Yes, my dear, horrible," he would reply sincerely.

"We are an absurd couple," Mary would continue, revelling in such expositions, "but what foresight of Providence to marry Austin to an unchristian wife like me. Otherwise he would be far too good for human nature's daily food. As it is I hate my enemies and skirmish about the village, liking the villains and annoying the godly. Coping with me keeps Austin almost human."

"By showing the fallibility of all human aims," was the rector's usual answer to this.

Patricia, invading the study where Mary was at work this morning, greeted her eagerly.

"I've come begging," she said.

Mrs. Winter looked up, revealing an attractive, weather-beaten face from which shone out a pair of very bright blue eyes.

"You are beginning rather late in life, aren't you?" she said. "And I'd have you to know that I am the only authorized beggar in this parish."

"Oh, Mary, I've let the fishing. Isn't it splendid, with Michael coming home to-morrow and so terribly little money in the world?"

"That is good news," said Mrs. Winter cordially. "But where did you find this Isaak Walton?"

"I didn't. I haven't even seen him. It was Towner, and his name is Royle, so Towner says. He

came to the Inn yesterday inquiring about fishing prospects, and Towner immediately thought of me and fixed it all up. It was very decent of the old man for he might have sent him to the Manor."

"Um, yes," said Mrs. Winter dryly, "but why, if this Mr. Royle has done him no harm? No, my dear, Towner has his likes and dislikes and cherishes them faithfully. I like old Towner. How long will your fisherman stay, do you suppose?"

"I don't know and that's where the begging comes in. No doubt it will depend upon the sport, partly, and whether he's happy and amused, and I thought that if Austin could meet him and be nice to him, providing he's the right sort, it would make all the difference . . . another man to talk to . . . and he might even take it on for the rest of the season."

"Why, of course Austin will. He must." Mrs. Winter was delighted with such feminine strategy, and quickly considered the position. "Austin will have been at Cambridge with him, or his cousin or his uncle or someone. I shall insist upon it. Failing that, he can develop a passion for fishing and that will be a tie."

"Who can?" inquired the rector, coming in at this moment.

Patricia greeted him with a smile.

"I'm afraid it's you," she said.

"But, my dear girl, I don't know one end of a fly from another."

"Then it is quite time you did," retorted his wife.

"Good gracious, Austin, don't tell me you were never a horrid little boy."

She explained the situation at length and the rector listened, amused but understanding.

"Royle? There was a Royle at Caius," he said reflectively when she had finished, then stood amazed at the sudden laughter of the two women.

"Austin, you are a gem. Didn't I say there would have been?" cried Mary. "Well, there you are, then."

"But," proceeded Austin, imperturbably, "I can't imagine his fishing anybody's waters, except perhaps his own."

"You didn't like him," said Mary, with wifely intuition. "But never mind, the name will at least form a bond to introduce you to old Towner's guest."

"You don't expect me to call at the Inn and present the bond, I hope?" expostulated the rector mildly.

"No, you must lurk about . . . in a dignified, clerical manner, of course . . . and find an opportunity to speak to him. And if he is a suitable acquaintance for your innocent wife, ask him to tea or something. It is all right, Patricia, he'll do it. When does Michael come home, did you say . . . to-morrow? I'll drive you over to meet him and we'll come back for the last of the strawberries. I've been saving them for him."

"You are a dear!" exclaimed Patricia.

"By the way," observed the rector after a mo-

ment, "I have just seen Mrs. Willingdon and she tells me the Window is really on the way at last."

There was a sudden silence. Patricia looked out into the garden; Mary Winter's mouth set in a grimace.

"Oh, well, I daresay she only dreamt it," she said at length.

"Mary!"

"But she does dream, Austin. You know she does. Oh, it's no good. I can't like this Window and neither I am sure can Patricia."

"I don't mind it," said Patricia soberly. "I don't mind twenty windows. But memorials come too late."

"Not all, my dear," said the rector.

She looked at him gratefully, yet with a faint alarm, and turned to the door.

"I must fly," she said. "I have so much to do before Michael comes home. Thanks awfully about my fisherman."

She was gone and they saw her walking away among the flowers.

"I don't mind your having twenty windows either," said Mary stormily, "if they could simply grow up in the night. But there will be all the fuss and parade of it and the Dedication and they won't ask her, of course."

"She wouldn't come, I fancy, if they did."

"No, and that Doris, I suppose, will be trailing about as chief mourner."

"Mary, Mary!"

Mrs. Winter laughed and returned to her accounts.

"You had better go away," she said, "or I shall say something worse."

ii

Christopher Royle unconsciously assisted Mary Winter's plot to attach him to Dorne, by strolling that afternoon through the village, for its beauty attracted him and his zest for fishing was not so great that he was in any hurry to begin.

Towner, landlord of the Duffield Arms, had recommended a stretch of water running through an estate just outside the village, had obligingly seen the owner for him, and then in person shown him a short cut to the river. The walk there and back had given the visitor an opportunity to ask the old man one or two questions, but they had been unproductive as far as his purpose was concerned.

"I suppose there are some old estates in Dorne?" Christopher had suggested.

"Not as you'd say old, sir. There's the Manor, Colonel Willingdon's place, but it only goes back a century, they say. The Colonel, he bought it from Sir Peter Duffield eighteen years back, Sir Peter wanting something bigger and more stylish. He built Highways, which you will see on the other side of Dorne, a rare big place and a precious waste of money if you ask me, him being always abroad as he is."

"Oh, well," Christopher had consoled him, "no doubt when a man builds a place like that, he is thinking of his sons."

Towner had shaken his head.

"Sir Peter, he never had a son, and if he had he'd 'a been killed by now, I daresay. It's the only sons the War took, mostly, it seems to me. There was Colonel Willingdon's boy and my own lad and a dozen others in Dorne alone I could mention. You'd think it was done a-purpose, only the rector he won't allow that."

"Hard luck," said Christopher, and then with a little smile: "I was one of two, and we both came through it."

"Well, there you are, sir, but glad I am of it since you're bringing a bit of money to the Arms," said Towner with a twinkle.

Christopher laughed, liking the old rascal, but he was thinking: "I've come to the wrong Dorne then, evidently, if none of the local people had a son who came through."

He was in no mind to hurry away, nevertheless, for the country was beautiful and Towner seemed likely to make him comfortable, so after luncheon he set off for the village.

The church of St. Michael at least was old, he saw, and he was gazing up at it when the Rev. Austin Winter came into the churchyard from the Rectory garden.

Christopher, who disliked those intelligent people who roam the country, looking knowingly at old

buildings, felt as though he had been caught on somebody else's property.

"I was trying to make out the period," he said in apology.

"Norman, superimposed on Early English," explained the rector. "It puzzles many people. Some of the interior of the church is rather fine, if you are interested in such things. Won't you come in and see it?"

Christopher, seeing himself labelled intelligent, and properly caught, followed him into the church.

"Glass, you will notice, is not our strong point," said the rector, when they had examined the thirteenth century rood screen and Saxon font, with somewhat laborious politeness on both sides, "but there we are in luck. One window is shortly to be filled with old Italian glass . . . a memorial to our local War hero, young Willingdon from the Manor. But perhaps you are a stranger to this part of Gloucestershire?"

"Absolutely," confessed Christopher. "I came to get some fishing to tell you the truth, though it is rather late in the season, and the landlord of the Inn has arranged for me to try my luck on a private stretch of water . . . Woden, is it?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Eden's place."

"I believe that was the name Towner mentioned. I didn't go myself . . . rather funked it, in fact. It seemed impertinent rather . . . asking to invade somebody else's property like that."

Austin Winter found himself suddenly liking the other man.

"Not a bit of it," he declared. "Almost any property owner is glad to make a little extra money out of his estate in these hard times, Miss Eden in particular. By the way, the Rectory has the distinction of being the oldest house in Dorne if you'd care to come and have a look at it."

"It is extremely kind of you, but I'm afraid I am taking up rather a lot of your time."

"Not in the least. It is a pleasure to meet some one who appreciates these old things. Locally perhaps we have known them too long. By liking them you revive their beauty and make us forget that the church is draughty and the Rectory damp. My wife always declares the house droops when visitors revile it."

Christopher found this statement rather attractive. It was part of what he came to think of later as the unrectorial attitude of the Winters.

"Why not?" he said. "Reviling can spoil almost any sort of beauty, the way we play upon each other. Some people, I think, carry a destructive atmosphere with them wherever they go, though perhaps as a churchman you won't agree to that."

"As a churchman it is part of my job to know it," said the other smiling. "Almost the most important part, I'm inclined to believe . . . certainly more important than preaching two indifferent sermons a week, above the heads of more than half

the congregation and beneath the intelligence of the rest."

"I shall come and see if you do," said Christopher promptly.

"Splendid! And you won't revile me afterwards? By the way, my name is Winter. . . . Shall we go in this way?"

As they passed into the Rectory garden Christopher mentioned his own name and his host, not without inward amusement, said reflectively:

"Royle? . . . There was a Royle at Caius with me, but he would have been an older man than you. Let me see, H. E. Royle, I think."

"He was my brother."

"Was?" said the other, sympathetically. "The War, I suppose?"

"No, he came through the War all right. He died six months ago."

"I am sorry to hear that. Not," added Winter frankly, "that I knew him very well."

"Oh, neither did I," said Christopher, and the two men smiled in sudden understanding.

Mary Winter saw them approaching, guessed the stranger's identity and, being a lady of resource, ordered the tea-table to be taken into the garden. As they reached the house she herself came out of it, carrying a plate of fruit. ("For," she thought craftily, "all men are children and he will never be able to resist my strawberries.")

Christopher, already pleasantly disposed to a lady who disliked her house to droop, was more inter-

ested in looking at her than the fruit she carried, noting the tall figure in its bright blue linen gown, the attractive curve of her short gray hair and her keen, humorous glance.

"Let me introduce you to my wife," said the rector. "Mary, my dear, this is Mr. Royle, with whom I seem to have a number of things in common, including . . . shall we say a slight acquaintance with his brother, who was at Cambridge with me?"

"Splendid," said Mary. "You are just in time for tea. But don't take too much notice of my husband in his more unclerical moments, Mr. Royle. He can be quite orthodox, really."

"I can't impose upon you like this," Christopher protested to the suggestion of tea.

They overruled him, for which he was grateful, for he had been all too long away, he felt, from the people of his own kind. And as he followed his hostess to the tea-table, he said:

"I am afraid I like what you call his unclerical moments. Every layman does. If I knew Mr. Winter better I should say it was very clever of him." Then, turning to Austin, he added: "And if you had said *'De mortuis,'* I should probably have sprinted out the gate and never have been seen again."

"I don't know that I could have blamed you," said Austin, amused, "but exhortations of that kind are so perilously easy that for very shame one must avoid them. It is appalling to think how much ancient wisdom we have converted into nonsense

by misusing it for our own private ends. *De Mortuis nil nisi bonum.* Don't libel a man, who being dead cannot defend himself. But to detest a man in life and then call him 'poor dear old So-and-So' because he is dead is a nice mixture of impertinence and hypocrisy. We have no right to suppose he is poor and certainly never considered him dear."

"Your sermons may be over my head," said Christopher to this, "but I'll swear they are entertaining."

"Ah, well, I suppose it is better that you should consider the church a place of entertainment rather than a penitentiary," the rector consoled himself with mournful humor.

Christopher Royle had found friends . . . a miracle to a lonely man. There was mutual liking in the easy flash of words about the tea-table, while the old house seemed to smile upon them, tranquil and lovely, and an army of flowers stood by.

Then into the Rectory garden there walked another visitor and enchantment fell upon him.

He had never seen such a beautiful old lady. There are, strictly speaking, no old ladies any more, but Mrs. Willingdon had not discovered this, or perhaps had ignored it. Her white hair was uncut and, beautifully dressed, showed like fine silk beneath her drooping hat. Her gown of rich gray was touched at the neck and wrists with old rose point, which Christopher, being a man, did not identify, but he knew it was exquisite.

It was her face however that caught and held

him, for it had about it a glow, a radiance, that at any age in any woman can wring the hearts of men. Her skin was matchless, soft and white as a child's, her eyes beneath curling lashes were deeply brown, coquettish eyes, yet wide too and innocent.

There should have been some flaw; she was almost too perfect, too adorable, but Christopher could not detect it. White, slender, little feet, and even a voice to match the whole.

"Oh, my dears," she said, including Christopher, for since he was evidently a friend of the Winters, her glance seemed to say, he must be a friend of hers, she being old and having known them so long.

Austin, perforce, introduced the other man, and she smiled upon him, as she continued, sinking into the chair that Mary brought her:

"I simply had to come and see you about my beautiful Window. I couldn't wait. It's coming tomorrow, or perhaps the next day, so you see my dream is coming true and my darling boy will be remembered after all."

"He has never been forgotten," said Mary Winter bluntly.

"I know, I know. He is in all our hearts, but this will be a real remembrance for the world to see. And I wanted to ask you about the inscription. I think we should have all his splendid deeds set out, but John is so obstinate and so military and he says they speak for themselves."

"Don't you think his honors speak for them,"

said the rector with his gentle smile. "The M.C. and D.S.O."

"Ah, but he should have had the V.C.," said Mrs. Willingdon, as a triumphant answer to that.

Why did the phrase wake a familiar echo for Christopher Royle? He could not remember, and he said quickly, afraid lest disappointment should dim that beautiful face:

"So many brave chaps should have had it, but I suppose there were not enough to go round."

"Ah, but if he had lived they would have given it to him. His commanding officer practically told me, and that's why I think we should mention the things he did. You must see our wonderful Window, Mr. Royle. Old Italian glass. I have a very fair picture of it. Mrs. Winter shall bring you to the Manor to-morrow."

She had the air of a queen conveying a favor and certain of being obeyed, but Mrs. Winter said, calmly:

"Sorry, but I am going to Hillthorpe to-morrow, Mrs. Willingdon, and Mr. Royle has come to Dorne to fish. We must not interrupt his sport."

The old lady smiled at Christopher.

"Indeed we shall," she said. "Young men are all alike. I know them. They love to get into old clothes and make a thorough mess. My boy was just the same. But you will be kind to an old woman and leave the fishing long enough to come over to tea at five o'clock. There will be just as good fish in the Severn the day after."

"I shall be charmed," said Christopher.

Oddly the Winters had receded into the background of the picture in the presence of their lovely guest, but now he caught Mary's sardonic glance upon him, and it brought him to his feet. After all, he was a stranger here, an interloper. He felt he had stayed too long.

As the rector accompanied him to the gate, he said, like a sleeper who suddenly awakes:

"I ought not to have said I would go, of course. She imagines I am a friend of yours. What do you think I should do? Send a note of apology?"

"My dear chap, no. You must go, of course. Why not? She will expect it and after all we must pity her. He was her only son."

"And when you are at a loose end, don't forget that my wife and I will be delighted to see you at any time," added Austin. "Don't hurry away from Dorne."

"Thanks, awfully. I shall not forget," said Christopher.

The rector's words went with him oddly. "We can only pity her." Surely the phrase was all wrong. You could not pity such a woman. You could only wonder and admire.

CHAPTER IV

i

MARY WINTER drove to Woden for Patricia next morning in a car which was no beauty but the darling of her heart. She talked to him as she drove (for he was no "she," she said, but a good fellow and had been one of the lads. She called him Archibald and suspected him of a gay and frivolous past before he had decided to settle down and become a staid rectory car).

Patricia was waiting and with her an old English sheep dog, who immediately leapt into the back seat and sat up like a grandee.

"Well, Blinkers, a bit of an occasion, eh?" said Mary, nodding to him in salutation.

Blinkers shook the long hair out of his eyes and panted with delight, knowing perfectly well the object of this journey. It had been an exciting morning for a dog, people rushing about the house since dawn; and in Blinkers' experience that meant only one thing. Michael was coming home. From now onward he would be a king among dogs.

"Well, we've met your fisherman, my dear," said Mary to Patricia as they set out for Hillthorpe. "And you are to come over to dinner to-night and meet him yourself."

"Oh, Mary, not on Michael's very first evening. I couldn't, really."

"Michael won't mind. I'll talk to him as man to man, and it is all in a good cause. He is a nice fellow, Mr. Christopher Royle, and the more entertaining he finds us, the longer he'll stay to fish."

"I have forgotten how to be entertaining and I should be a skeleton at the feast."

"No good, my dear, you are committed. I wrote and told him you were coming and if you let me down he'll think me a designing female, getting him to a dull rectory under false pretences." She stole a look at her friend. "The fact is, Patricia, Mrs. Willingdon unfortunately arrived in the scene when he was having tea with us and snapped him up. I tried to rescue the poor dear but he foundered hopelessly. He is to go over there this afternoon and, as I said to Austin, we must provide an antidote for that."

"If he is going to the Manor it is much better that I should not meet him," said Patricia levelly.

"Very well then, he'll leave Dorne to-morrow. He'll fly. I'm certain of it. Austin has so few friends and he has taken an immense liking to your fisherman. Don't be a selfish cat."

Patricia, laughing, gave in, though she knew the craftiness of this argument and her heart was not in the promised entertainment. In these days she hated meeting strangers, especially anyone in favor at the Manor.

Hillthorpe, a little market town, tucked in the

Cotswolds, was the nearest railway point to Dorne. As the two women and the dog reached the station, the train from town came in, disgorging among a crowd of schoolboys, the excited, flying form of Michael Eden.

"Oh, I say, hullo. Isn't this a lark?" said Michael, in off-hand greeting, for at nearly nine one must keep a wary eye out against possible feminine embraces. The same great age, however, does not debar one from an exuberant greeting from one's dog, and Blinkers and the small boy were soon tangled together and working off their emotion in concert.

"Are we going home in Archibald?" asked Michael, emerging from the tangle at last.

"Yes, and what do you think, Michael, we've let the fishing," said Patricia.

"Have we really?" Michael was deeply concerned with the economic position of his house. "Shall we make a lot of money out of it . . . pounds even?"

"If he likes it and stays."

"Then," said Michael triumphantly, "you can have a new dress."

"Oh, dear, don't you like this one?" asked Patricia in dismay.

"Um . . . yes . . . it's rather decent, but I meant a . . . well, you know what I mean, a proper silk one."

"Don't plant extravagant ideas in the feminine breast, young man," admonished Mrs. Winter.

"Oh, well," said Michael, quite accustomed to such talk, "she hasn't an awful lot of clothes."

Mary Winter smiled, thumping him manfully on the back.

"The fact is you want to show her off, you rascal. Come along now. Jump up. Strawberries for lunch."

Michael jumped with alacrity and Blinkers followed him, stretching out on the seat and laying his head and paws over the boy's bare knees. Archibald woke from sleep, grunted a little and carried them off to Dorne.

Though tongues at Dorne might wag about Michael Eden, he was at this time a singularly lucky child, for whom the world held no dismay. Friendly by nature, he was happy at school, while holidays were a rich adventure . . . excursions with Blinkers, long talks with Maginnis, gardener and handy man and his most intimate friend; tussles with Mrs. Cope, who ruled the house with duster and broom and a scolding voice that didn't deceive him for a moment; visits to a courtesy uncle and aunt at the Rectory, where gorgeous things were produced for a fellow to eat at tactful intervals; and last of all, Patricia. Michael had immense confidence in her, though the attitude between them was casual in the extreme. She was "my people" when he spoke of her to the boys at school and he would willingly have died for her, but he wouldn't have said so for the world.

That they were hard up he knew, but he was not

yet of an age to feel the lack of material things. Patricia, however, worried about it, and now she said to Mary Winter:

"Oh, dear, why doesn't money grow on the trees at Woden?"

"You make more grow there than most people could," said Mary practically. "Is it worse than usual just now?"

"No, but I'm growing into a thorough miser, Mary. Fate must be paying me back for the way I used to fling my money about when I had it. I do accounts in my head all day and dream them at night, and I find myself actually counting the roses to see how many I can sell. It's dreadful. I picked a big jar for the house to-day just to put a stop to it."

"Absurd, aren't you?"

"It's not the present, but the future that troubles me. Michael ought to go to a public school to give him a chance in life."

"But bless your heart they don't, if we are to believe the newspapers," protested Mrs. Winter.

Patricia laughed.

"Oh, Mary, you are a darling. You always do me good," she said.

"There he is . . . oh, look, there he is," cried Michael, catching a glimpse of the fisherman through the trees.

Blinkers sat up and looked over the side of the car in mild inquiry. Why were they passing the gates of his home? But after all it didn't matter

and he settled down again. He was not, he seemed to say, a fussy dog, and home to him just now was anywhere in the vicinity of this god beside him.

ii

Christopher Royle had received Mrs. Winter's note of invitation when he came down to breakfast that morning, with pleasure and a sense of relief. He had been suffering since the afternoon before from a return of an old diffidence which had troubled him long ago. Removed from the spell of Mrs. Willingdon's presence, he felt uneasy about his visit to the Manor, as though he had jumped at an invitation which must after all have been offered him under a misapprehension. Mrs. Winter's quick glance of derision was in part responsible for that, so that her cordial little note relieved him. He could not, he saw now, have done anything as unpardonably gauche as he had feared.

He decided to spend most of the day fishing and, having been supplied with a picnic luncheon by Mrs. Towner, he set off for Woden in excellent spirits.

For so small a property he found Miss Eden's had a good stretch of water, and the beauty of its setting immediately entranced him. He could see the house as he went by and before it a daisied lawn set with standard roses, but down here by the stream it was all a wilderness. No money, he thought the rector had suggested. Hard that, and yet the very wildness of the place added to the beauty of the swiftly running waters under the ancient trees.

England and what a country!

"She is not any common earth
Water or wood or air,
But Merlin's isle of Graymarye
Where you and I will fare."

Yes, Kipling knew, and yet wasn't there more truth really in that other thing——

"I am the land of their Fathers;
In me the virtue stays.
I will bring back my children
After certain days."

That was no song of England, but of all countries, of any country, for, after all, he thought, aren't we a part of this earth and water, wood and air, part of the land that bore us and to which, through generation after generation, the dust of our fathers has returned?

Patriotism, of course, should be a conscious state of mind, he knew, a passionate sense of the justice of a cause, but in actual fact it was nothing of the kind: it was a blind instinct to defend our own.

A wise man's country is the world. Who said that? Some old sage. Then we are all unwise, for how else all down the ages should exile have been the last and greatest penalty? Christopher thought of old Pollock, sent from Windy, but soon to learn that he was called back; and somehow at this moment the privilege of calling him seemed the best

part of his inheritance. During his own absence abroad he had not thought of England very much except as something at the moment unattainable, but with luck to be attained; yet now he knew that if he had had to die out there, as that poor chap Robertson had died, he would have felt cheated and furious.

His fishing that day was a desultory affair, for his heart was not in it. He smoked and dreamed, he ate his luncheon, he lay under trees green-latticed against the summer sky while the river ran past him with flashes of silver as it caught the sun.

Christopher Royle had come home . . . not to Windyhill, for from there he was still an exile for a little while . . . but to England in the lovely quiet of Patricia Eden's garden.

Towards four, rather reluctantly, he gathered his things together to return to the Inn for a bath and change, and as he went he glimpsed the house again. With its wide open windows and the banner of smoke from a rear chimney, it had a friendly air; and as he looked a sheep dog ran out from somewhere and after him the joyous figure of a little boy.

So there were children at Woden . . . or at least one lucky lad? The place was beginning to take on for him a personality.

He turned his steps towards the Manor with a pleasant feeling of anticipation, not only for this further meeting with the beautiful old lady, but for the dinner at the Rectory afterwards. How im-

mensely kind to him they had been, all these people, complete stranger though he was. Yet soon, in a day or two, he realized, he must be moving on, to find that other village of Dorne and get rid of his responsibility to poor Robertson. He could have relegated it, no doubt, for there must be channels in town through which you could find out what you wanted to know about almost anyone; but this might be rather a delicate business, and surely it was little enough to attend to it himself, if only in gratitude to the Fates for his own so much better fortune.

In his contemplation of the task ahead of him, he missed the entrance to the Manor, and, redirected to it, found it at last with dismay. There had been a lodge at one time but now it was closed and empty and fallen into disrepair. A window fronting the road was broken, and what had once been a little garden ran in a riot of tall weeds and seedlings to the door.

Christopher, who had been too long away from England to have any knowledge of what post-war conditions had done to so many old estates, was shocked, but even the lodge did not prepare him for the desolation inside. What must have been once a lovely garden was now abandoned to decay . . . uncut lawns and hedges, broken borders, paths and flower-beds overgrown and gravel worn away; this as a background for the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. What was it, poverty? Yet these people could buy an old Italian Window to the

memory of their son. It seemed incredible, a nightmare from which surely he must soon awake.

He wondered if the house might dispel it, but it did not. As a maid ushered him through a chill hall to the drawing-room, he saw it still, this desolation. The house smelt faintly of mildew and there were damp spots upon the walls. Curtains were colorless, carpets worn and the whole character of the room seemed to have faded away.

In the center of it, as a queen upon her throne in a palace of the dead, sat Mrs. Willingdon, even lovelier than before. She was in mauve to-day, a rich, thick silk, and spotless as though it at least were new. There were pearls about her lovely throat, her fingers were heavily ringed, and on her couch of dull old gold brocade were heaped all the cushions in the room.

Christopher was not at first conscious of any other presence, until, having greeted him adorably, his hostess turned her head and called:

"John, my darling . . . Mr. Royle, our guest."

Then he saw rising with difficulty from a leather chair set in the bay window to catch the sun, a very tall old man.

Colonel Willingdon tried to rise but, caught in a paroxysm of coughing, sank into his chair again, the younger man hurrying towards him meanwhile and begging him not to move.

"You must forgive me, Mr. Royle, my bronchitis has been rather troublesome."

His fine courtesy and evident concern for his con-

dition, the shabby dressing gown and thin rug over his knees were pitiful to Christopher, and he felt an almost overmastering impulse to turn and run away. What right had he here . . . a stranger, an intruder? But Mrs. Willingdon was calling him to her side and perforce he had to obey.

"Poor John has a cough," she said, "but it will be better to-morrow. He does so hate being a little ill, like all you men . . . babies, every one of you. Now tell me, has it come yet, my Window?"

Christopher explained that he did not know. He had been fishing all day and had seen no one from the village.

"Ah, then it has not come, or you would most certainly have heard from somebody," said the old lady. "They are all so immensely interested, in the village, the dear things. I am impatient, Mr. Royle. You don't know what it means to an old woman to have her dream come true. John laughs at me. He doesn't care tuppence for windows, do you, John?"

"If it makes you happy, my darling," said the Colonel tenderly. "I am a soldier, Mr. Royle, and as I grow older I realize that the man who dies in battle has all the fortune of war. As for the Window . . . well, the world will forget him all the same."

"John, John, how absurd you are." Mrs. Willingdon was plaintive, but she did not take him very seriously, it was clear. "How can it forget

my boy with his name set out in black and white before it every day?"

"Ah, my dear," said the Colonel, shaking his head. "It is the things set out in black and white that so many of us never see."

There was no bitterness in his voice, it seemed to Christopher, but an infinite sadness. He had the look of a dying man watching the disintegration of his house. Yet was that perhaps merely a stranger's view . . . an absurd stranger, too deeply interested in the spectacle called Life? Mrs. Willingdon at least was vital still and it was evident the poor old man adored her.

She cried, with her brightest look at him:

"He loves to pretend he is hard and cynical, Mr. Royle, but don't you believe him. He is the kindest soul. Ah, here is tea at last and my darling Doris . . . Doris, love, this is Mr. Royle, who has come to hear all about the Window."

Christopher, supposing the newcomer to be a daughter of the house, looked at her curiously. She was somewhere about thirty, he thought, and her perfectly cut and very modern clothes were a queer contrast to her surroundings. Yet something of the atmosphere of the place seemed to have caught her too. She was inert, only waking to animation under the spell of Mrs. Willingdon's voice.

"Shall I pour out tea for you, dearest?" she said, as one speaking to a favorite child.

"Do, my pet. You always spare me, but weak, please, for strong tea is so bad for us all."

"Won't you let me make myself useful, Miss Willingdon?" asked Christopher, going to the tea-table, and Doris, glancing up to thank him, answered, as one quite used to making the explanation:

"My name is Duffield."

"My dear daughter all but in name," supplemented Mrs. Willingdon affectionately. "Poor Doris was to have married my boy."

"She must be a great comfort to you," said Christopher, feeling awkward.

"She is indeed. Just a tiny sandwich for the Colonel, if you will be so kind, Mr. Royle. We must tempt his poor appetite."

Christopher wished he could tempt it with a good beef steak, but the Colonel accepted the little sandwich and weak tea with his courteous smile and tried to do his best with them. The young man, having received his own cup from Miss Duffield, presently came and sat by his host and spoke to him of the beauty of Dorne.

"A very lovely country," agreed the Colonel, his sad eyes lighting for a moment. "Gloucestershire has few rivals, I think, but I am sorry you could not have seen Dorne in happier days, Mr. Royle. So many of us are too poor in these new times to give our estates the attention they require."

"John darling, my cushions," interrupted Mrs. Willingdon, plaintively. In putting down her cup she had sent the cushions flying, and Christopher and Doris immediately rose to restore them to her. Ill as he was, however, the Colonel was too quick

for them, and as he piled them once more behind her lovely shoulders, she caught his old hand and held it against her cheek.

"See how he spoils me," she said to her guest. "It has always been the same . . . all my life, hasn't it, John? Such a lucky woman."

The old man disengaged himself gently, patting her hand and smiling as he did so.

"Now you will let me run away," he said. "Mr. Royle will excuse me, I know, for it is time for my medicine. I hope we shall see more of you, my boy, if you are remaining at Dorne."

"It is very kind of you, sir, but I am afraid I must move on in a day or two."

"Oh, no, no, dear Mr. Royle, you must stay for the Dedication of my Window. Promise that you will stay," cried the old lady, imperiously. "Doris, love, give Mr. Royle some more tea and then you will find the picture for me, won't you?"

Christopher declined the tea, and Miss Duffield, having finished her own, went off on this quest.

"He's a love, a dear, my John," said his hostess confidentially as soon as they were alone, "but oh, so jealous. He is jealous of the Window, jealous of poor Doris, and he was even jealous of my darling boy." She spoke with a rich enjoyment, evidently loving this quality in her John as she would love it in any man. She was the eternal coquette.

Miss Duffield returned with the picture which was enshrined in a catalogue of art treasures, Mrs. Wil-

lingdon turning over the pages with the eager excitement of a child.

"There now," she said, displaying it triumphantly at last.

The reproduction was in color on heavy art paper, the history of the Window set out somewhat preciously on a blank sheet beside it. It had begun life in the chapel of an old monastery near Padua now in ruins, had been brought from Italy fifty years ago by a prominent collector and erected in his house in Park Lane, passing into the hands of the dealers when his art treasures were sold after his death. The subject was not quite clear to Christopher though he admitted the beauty of color and design. The catalogue, with a ready eye on the main chance, declared it a particularly beautiful and suitable work for a War Memorial of either a public or private nature, and Mrs. Willingdon, with touching faith in the printed word, had evidently seized upon that.

"It was my clever Doris who found it for me," she said, but Miss Duffield disclaimed any credit for the discovery, with a fond look at the elder woman.

The catalogue, it seemed, had come to her father, and when she was at Dorne it was her practice to go over to Highways every few days to keep an eye upon things. She had brought it back with her among various other circulars and letters which did not seem sufficiently important to send on to Sir Peter at Monte Carlo.

"But you found the Window, dearest," she added tenderly to Mrs. Willingdon.

"*Yes,*" said that lady in a pleased tone. "I saw it at once, and that night, Mr. Royle, I dreamt that we had bought it for my son. All my life I have had these wonderful dreams . . . it is a curious faculty I have . . . and afterwards they have come true."

Again a vague note of familiarity about this phrase touched Christopher Royle, but it was immediately engulfed by nearer considerations. Had her other dreams, he wondered, with his first touch of cynicism about her, been as expensive as this? For the catalogued price of the Window was £1500, and all his inborn sense of property and one's obligation to it, made him set this sum against the ruin of the house and garden.

The Window became horrible.

"There is nothing to show us the exact meaning of the design, you see," proceeded Mrs. Willingdon, "but that is so satisfactory because without anything definite to go on we can put our own interpretation on it."

"Allegorical perhaps," suggested Christopher. "I don't know very much about such things, but don't you think it may be meant to represent St. Anthony of Padua, since it came from that neighborhood . . . the local saint?"

"Or why not dear St. George?" said Mrs. Willingdon eagerly, "for after all he must often have appeared without the dragon, and that would be so beautifully appropriate. My boy's name, you see, was George."

Christopher thought with an inward smile: "Then St. George it will most certainly be."

"There, darling, put it away for me very carefully, won't you?" she went on, closing the catalogue and handing it to Miss Duffield. "The bottom drawer of my desk, love."

The girl took it, folded it in tissue paper and walked to the door.

Then she turned back for a moment and gave Christopher Royle the shock of his life.

"Shall I bring Terry's photograph?" she said.

CHAPTER V

i

TERRY?

Christopher could not believe that he had heard aright. This tragic place was getting on his nerves, and the matter of that poor chap Robertson had been so much in his mind during the past few days that he must have imagined the Terry.

He said to Mrs. Willingdon in a voice that to his own ears sounded curiously unreal and far away:

"Did you tell me your son's name was George?"

"George Terence Willingdon, M.C., D.S.O." She added the honors with a little smile, half playful, half proud. "See, here it is." She drew a sheet of note paper from a book beside her and held it out to him, and he read, in a fine, wavering writing, what was evidently a rough draft of the proposed inscription for the Window.

"In ever loving memory of my darling son
Captain George Terence Willingdon, M.C., D.S.O.
Who gave his life in the Great War."

"My darling son" had been crossed out, however, and lower down several variations added,

"Only son of Colonel and Mrs. Willingdon
of Dorne Manor, in his 22nd year."

Christopher read no more. "God," he thought, "this is ghastly. It's incredible . . . these poor creatures ruining themselves to put up a window to a fellow who never died at all," and at the look on his face, Mrs. Willingdon patted his hand, thanking him for his charming sympathy.

He could not deny it, of course; he couldn't answer. He only knew that once more he had an impulse to run, out of the house, out of Gloucestershire, away from a situation so ironic.

With an effort he pulled himself together. Perhaps he was all wrong and this was just one of those impossible coincidences that do happen in life. After all, what right had he ever had to suppose the letter to a chap called "Terry" had any bearing on the identity of Robertson himself? It might have been written to another man altogether and there were a hundred different reasons why Robertson might have eventually possessed and treasured it . . . evil reasons of course among them . . . revenge perhaps, or blackmail.

Recalling Hatherley's denunciation of Robertson, he considered this solution all too likely; if the right one, his own possession of the letter now was fortunate. He could destroy it and prevent its misuse in unscrupulous hands.

Although he argued with himself so speciously, Christopher was not really convinced and when Miss

Duffield returned with the photograph he took it reluctantly. He didn't want to look at it. He didn't want to know.

But the two women were watching him eagerly, and there seemed no option. He carried it to the window where the light would fall full upon the young officer's face.

Not much likeness here to the fever-stricken, unshaven creature who had called himself Robertson. . . . And yet, those tilted eyes, that quick, appealing smile!

With a feeling almost of physical sickness Christopher heard himself saying:

"He has a charming face."

"Indeed he was charming, such a darling," said his mother proudly, "and the soul of honor, Mr. Royle, as well as a hero. And how he adored me. In all his life he only went against my wishes once and then when he found how ill it made me he gave in, in a moment. He was the dearest boy."

Her guest hardly heard her. Almost against his will his brain was trying to piece out this youngster's story. Did they really imagine he had been killed in action? But they must. Any other explanation, in view of the Window, was too cynical. It was unbelievable. Or was this perhaps yet another instance of how they had shielded her . . . this woman they all adored? Remembering the old man's fine face Christopher could not believe it; for you might think as you liked about memorials . . . that they were all rot, a sentimental gesture, or a

tribute to the dead; but to raise one deliberately, not to perpetuate honor, but to hide dishonor, would be, however you looked at it, he thought, a dirty trick.

Yet if they did not know, how could it possibly have happened that they were so deceived?

He found himself saying to Mrs. Willingdon:

"He looks very young. I suppose you lost him early in the War?"

"No, no, right at the end . . . the very last day," she said. "He was so reckless, always, my Terry." Tears filled her eyes, and Christopher turned his own away in intolerable pain. Yet were they only tears of self-pity after all? "I was all alone, Mr. Royle, in that horrible time. My John had gone out to the East for the War Office . . . on a mission among those dreadful Bolsheviks, and it was months before he could even learn of my loss. But I had my darling Doris, and what a comfort!" She put up a hand and clasped the other woman's. "She never left me while the Colonel was away . . . over twelve months, my pet, wasn't it?"

"Oh, lord," thought Christopher. "I can't stand another moment of this."

ii

He was out of the house at last. He hardly knew how he had got there or by what incoherent excuses he had persuaded them to let him go; and now, with the desolation of the gardens under his eyes again, he was faced with the problem of what he was going to do about it all.

He knew that he did not want to do anything, except to escape from this tragic tangle into which all unwittingly he had intruded; and yet, by the possession of the diamonds, he was involved in it. Their equivalent in hard cash might do so much for this broken house, yet how, if both parents believed young Willingdon had died in France, was the passing on of the money to be compassed?

With Mrs. Willingdon alone it would have been simple enough. Finance and all such practical things, he surmised, were without much meaning for her, and self-deception had become to her not so much a practised art as second nature. With a little persuasion she would even dream the money and accept its appearance without surprise; but the Colonel was different. What possible pretext could make the offer of money to such a man anything but an impertinence?

The old conviction that life is a pretty ghastly riddle returned to Christopher Royle. In the pleasure of his homecoming it had receded somewhat; he had grown optimistic and begun to think that after all the world might be a rather decent place. But what blind folly, he thought, what a tempting of the Fates; for here we are all mixed up in the riddle whether we like it or not, flung together by chance or temperament or the other diabolical devices of Destiny, and yet so far apart in any common understanding.

Absurd that because of the conventions which hedge us round he could not go to the Colonel

frankly and say: "You need money for Dorne and here it is." Even an intimate friend like that nice chap, the rector, could hardly venture to do that, and yet what more fitting use could there possibly be for Terry Willingdon's diamonds than the regeneration of his home?

Christopher had momentarily forgotten the letter with its implication of a very different responsibility and now he recalled it with a fresh dismay. This was something more of which perhaps the Willingdons knew nothing, for their son, they said, had been engaged to Miss Duffield. But it was most certainly not to her that the girl, Pat, had paid her visit.

"What a mess," he said to himself, "and I seem to be in it up to the neck!"

He wondered how much the village knew about it, for the villages generally know everything and more, but though, as a casual stranger, he might have carefully sought this knowledge, his kindly reception by the Willingdons put that out of the question. He had no relish for the position of Peeping Tom.

Walking back towards the Inn he passed the village War Memorial, an old English cross in gray stone, which, in its simplicity, fitted, he thought, not only this lovely setting, but the idea for which it stood.

IN MEMORY OF
THE MEN OF DORNE
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE
GREAT WAR 1914-1918

"THEY WILL NOT GROW OLD AS WE WHO ARE LEFT
GROW OLD.
TIME SHALL NOT WITHER THEM NOR THE YEARS
CONTEMN.
WITH THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE
MORNING
WE SHALL REMEMBER THEM."

Binyon's lines were new to Christopher, and he read them several times, moved at once by their beauty and their absence of parade.

Simple chaps these would be for the most part, aware of no bitterness and no great convictions, but with a boy's love to be in a fight and a man's instinct to defend their own.

He glanced down the names, saw young Willingdon's and below it those of Towner's lad and a dozen men of his regiment; and more than ever the Window seemed a mockery. For how better could any man ask to be remembered than like this, in the sunny heart of his own village, among the men who had served him in peace and followed him in war?

CHAPTER VI

i

MARY WINTER might, as she said, annoy the godly, but she had an unerring touch with inanimate things. As the old car answered to her hand, so did the house. There was a glow about it, not wholly produced by much polishing, for she had too much humor to be house-proud in the terrible and destructive manner of some women. Her servants were not slaves, she said, at least of her making, and although she could be scathing on occasion, they liked her, because she did not make a tyranny of trifles.

She talked to them much as she talked to Archibald, or to the old drawing room when she came down in the morning and found its curtains still undrawn.

"Poor darling, didn't they let the sun in to warm his old bones," she would exclaim solicitously, and then, to the housemaid, hurrying in to see to the neglected task, "Eva, how cruel you are! The poor room's shivering."

"You do set a store by this room, m'm," said Eva on the afternoon of the dinner to Christopher Royle, finding her mistress surveying it with a critical eye. "Tom Pringle, he was telling me yesterday

the old rector's wife she was a one. She wouldn't have a flower picked out of the garden, and shut the house up tight, she did, for fear of the sun fading the carpets."

"Then we owe it all the sun and air we can give it to make up for such idiocy," declared Mary briskly, and flung open another window.

"Tom he happened to pass that window bringing in the butter and he seen all the flowers," said Eva. "'My,' he says, 'it's like a proper house, not a rec'try. Your missus has put a bit of life into the place.' That's what Tom says."

"Oh, indeed, and why is Tommy Pringle bringing the butter himself these days?" inquired her mistress in assumed surprise. "Haven't they a lad at the farm?"

"Yes, but Pringle, he wants to be sure you're well served, m'm, Tom says. The old rector wouldn't have nothing from the farm on account of Pringles' being chapel, and they wouldn't have you dissatisfied, not for the world, after you being so kind."

"Really? But Pringle has been serving me for eight years. How do you account for this sudden anxiety to please?"

"I don't know, m'm, I'm sure," said Eva, blushing.

"Ah, well, I daresay I can guess." There was a kindly twinkle in Mary Winter's eyes, for Eva was an uncommonly pretty girl, a fact that she, unlike some mistresses, held to be no crime in a

servant. "But since the Pringles are chapel, how will you manage when you want the banns put up? Have you thought of that?"

"Indeed there'll be no chapel weddings for me," said Eva, eagerly. "I said to Tom, the master'll marry me or nobody, I said, and Tom's quite willing. Though how you guessed, m'm, I can't think."

"I have eyes in my head, my dear, and so apparently has Tommy Pringle. He's a decent lad, but don't be in too much of a hurry, Eva. I don't want to lose you yet, you know."

"Oh, no, m'm. It'll be a year or two. Tom he's ambitious and wants to get a farm of his own, and his father's promised to help him once he's saved enough to make a start."

"Splendid, and you must save too. We'll make a bargain," said Mrs. Winter. "For every shilling you put in the Savings Bank, I'll add another; and as you haven't a mother to give you your wedding dress you must let me give it to you, Eva."

"Thank you, m'm, you're that good to me," cried the girl gratefully.

"Much too flash and dressy for a rectory servant," had been the village's comment, when Eva first came to Dorne. These critics would have been pleasantly scandalized to know that Mrs. Winter had chosen the girl for these very qualities and for the somewhat pert and defiant air with which she displayed them. Mary Winter knew her sex and could make a shrewd guess at the sort of treatment which had produced this attitude of defiance.

"I see you are fond of clothes," she had said, "which is perfectly natural in a pretty girl. I must try to let you have a definite hour to yourself every day so that you can take proper care of them."

Eva, entirely unbelieving, had been astounded to find this no empty promise and had repaid her mistress in her own fashion. Her indoor appearance was always perfection and in time her outdoor clothes and her outdoor manners toned down amazingly. She knew well what the village said, and she wasn't, she declared darkly to the cook, going to have no stones flung at the rec-try, not if she knew it.

Over tea that afternoon Mary told Eva's news triumphantly to Austin.

"The best match in the neighborhood," she said. "Isn't it splendid for Eva? Though no doubt if I had been a proper rector's wife I should have insisted on her bringing her Tom to be christened and confirmed and de-chapelitized immediately."

"I hope you are not suggesting that I am an improper rector," protested Austin, mildly. Just then the housemaid came into the room and he turned to her with a smile.

"Next time young Pringle is in the neighborhood, you might send him in for a chat with me . . . a business chat, Eva," he said. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, sir, that I can."

"Good. Then there's that small field of mine adjoining Pringle's. Tom may have it rent free

next season, if he can find time to plant it and make a little extra money out of the crop, but we won't tell the village, or all my parishioners who couldn't plant a field if they tried, will feel they have a prior claim to it."

"Thank you, sir. I won't breathe a word and Tom won't neither," promised the girl, delighted.

"Austin, you are a darling," said his wife when they were alone.

The rector shook his head.

"Merely her rather inefficient understudy," he said. "You took a big chance with that girl and well you knew it, young woman. I'm inclined to think you are the best Christian in my parish, even if you won't attempt to proseletize the Pringles."

"I am something much more interesting than that at the present moment," said Mrs. Winter. "I am a matchmaker, no less. Austin, I wish your nice Mr. Royle would take a fancy to Patricia."

The rector looked surprised.

"Aren't you forgetting Michael?"

"Certainly I am not forgetting Michael," flared Mary at once. "Any man, who *is* a man, ought to be proud to help her bring up Michael."

"I wasn't thinking of the man so much, though you can't tell how another chap would look at it. I was thinking of Patricia. She'd never take the risk."

"Then she should be made to take it. Oh, dear, you weren't in for lunch and didn't see Michael to-day."

"Why, there's nothing wrong with the youngster, is there?" asked the rector in quick concern.

"Wrong? Of course not. He's the same irresistible little dare-devil, but he is developing a lot, He will be a fascinating rascal in a few years."

"Oh, I see. You think he'll need a man's firm hand?"

"No, that hadn't occurred to me," admitted Mary, "because after all he can always have yours. Patricia is rather bothered about finding the money for a public school by and by. Don't you think when the time comes we might persuade her to let us help a bit?"

"Something of the kind had occurred to me."

"I rather thought it might."

Austin was a satisfactory husband . . . for a man, thought Mary, smiling to herself over the last phrase. But she wished she could guess how much he knew or suspected of this matter of Michael, if anything; for the little boy had changed since last term. The fluidity of young childhood had gone perhaps; his features were clearer, and in that bright glance of his as he jumped from the train, she fancied that she had caught a likeness, but it was only a likeness, to a photograph and she could not be sure. She herself went seldom to the Manor, but Austin was often there sitting with the old Colonel, whom he greatly liked. Yet if he too saw the resemblance, would he even give her a hint, she wondered? She often said that, unlike so many husbands and wives, she and Austin cherished hundreds

of secrets from each other. The truth was, both were reticent, and Mary was too fastidious to ask from Austin information which as a clergyman he might not feel himself free to give.

Patricia, she knew, thought the world of Austin. "But then," she said to herself, "she likes me too and trusts me, but she has never confided in *me*."

"I wish we had known Terry Willingdon," she said suddenly to Austin, after a silence.

Austin Winter knew his wife too well to imagine this change of subject mere feminine inconsequence as she evidently intended him to do.

He said, with just the right shade of mild curiosity:

"Why Willingdon in particular?"

"Oh, well, it would have made several things clear, I think . . . the Window for one."

"But the Window is clear enough, surely. It is a memorial to the youngster's heroism, and all our knowing him wouldn't have altered that. It must be true enough, Mary. A lad of that age isn't given the D.S.O. unless he has earned it pretty thoroughly."

"Oh, he was brave, of course. They say he was a perfect dare-devil," said Mary and did not realize that she had used the same word about Michael Eden five minutes before. Austin did not remind her.

"But why," she added, "did Patricia quarrel with the Willingdons? I'm inquisitive this afternoon."

"I think you are simply romantic. You are trying to persuade yourself that Patricia loved this boy, but aren't you forgetting Miss Duffield?"

"Not for a moment. Mrs. Willingdon dreamt that. She told me so herself."

"Mary, Mary, you can't dream two people into an engagement."

"I'm not so sure."

"Then you did mean that about Patricia! In other words," said Austin, "having decided to make a match for her, you are marshalling up all the reasons why it will not come off."

Mary laughed.

"Feminine, isn't it?" she said. "Never mind. Come and see the drawing room."

As they stood in the doorway looking in at the old room, with its panelled walls, dark oak furniture and masses of bright flowers, she put her hand in her husband's arm.

"At least they shall meet in a perfect setting," she said. "Austin, there's something nice about this house, or is it only you? I'm not a gushing person, naturally, but I like Christopher Royle. He's perceptive, I'm sure, and so few people seem to be that. Still, I won't let my match-making go any further than the setting, really. I shall be tact itself."

"Um," said the rector drily. "People who set out to be tactful are the most dangerous in the world. Tact is no virtue; it is merely a useful garment for schemers and knaves."

"Very well then, it is on your own head . . . and I shall probably throw them at each other's," declared Mary.

ii

Although she did not guess it Mary Winter was setting a stage for Christopher Royle that he was eager to occupy . . . not, however, in the leading rôle. He had hardly given Miss Eden a thought, but after his disturbing experience of the afternoon the pleasant old rectory and its eminently sane inhabitants seemed to him a milieu much to be desired. He put aside the subject of Terry Willingdon, his diamonds and his Window and determined to enjoy the evening.

Mrs. Winter herself came out of the drawing room to greet him, while the pretty housemaid was taking his coat and hat. The girl's air of demure excitement seemed to suggest that this was an occasion, and Christopher turned to his hostess with the gratitude of a man who has never been made a fuss of and enjoys the novelty.

"This is kind of you, Mr. Royle, to risk a dull rectory dinner," said Mary. "Come along and let me introduce you to Miss Eden."

Christopher looked at his fellow guest with surprise. He had expected the mistress of Woden to be older than this tall girl with the fresh complexion, short, curly hair and faintly satirical glance.

"I won't call her your landlady," proceeded Mrs.

Winter, "because it sounds so sinister, as well as being, I suppose, geographically incorrect."

"Why not benefactor?" suggested Christopher, as a challenge to the satirical glance.

"Oh, no." Miss Eden's voice, he discovered, was arresting, low-pitched and musical. "You are the benefactor, since I am taking your money. You don't know what a big part money plays at Dorne, Mr. Royle."

"Our local miser," explained Mary, waving a dramatic hand. "She told me so herself."

"No?" said Christopher, delighted. "Where does she keep her treasure, do you suppose? Up the chimney, or behind the wainscot?"

"Neither," said Miss Eden, "I keep it in the garden."

"Better and better. I shall borrow a spade from old Towner."

"I am afraid you will dig in vain. My treasures are above ground."

"Dear me, there must be a catch in this," declared Christopher, considering deeply. And then, remembering the little boy and the dog: "Why, of course, it's a human treasure."

He was amazed to see Miss Eden flush to the roots of her hair. Her voice, however, was perfectly composed as she answered:

"I'm not reduced to selling my fellow-creatures, yet, and my treasures are salable, luckily. Vegetables and roses, Mr. Royle."

"And you call yourself a miser?" Christopher

was reproachful. "You are Persephone . . . you must be, making glad the waste places."

"Very nicely played," said Mrs. Winter, and for the first time Patricia Eden smiled.

Christopher thought: "She's lovely and I didn't see it."

The rector appeared at that moment, from an interview with a parishioner in trouble, and the two men fell into talk, as they smoked a cigarette before dinner. Christopher was glad of the interruption. He no longer wanted to challenge Miss Eden, but he did want to look at her unawares, to watch again for the splendor of her smile. For some reason she both interested and amazed him, the more because he was certain now that she had been antagonistic at first and that with her smile the suspicion of him or whatever it was had slipped away. He was at least perceptive enough to recognize that she was on her guard, not against him perhaps, but against the world.

Mrs. Winter, in setting her stage, had not given much thought to the human background, but this perhaps was really more potent that the other. These three people seemed to Christopher amazingly harmonious, yet in a simple and undemonstrative fashion that in no sense shut him outside.

They dined at a round table looking on the garden, and Mary Winter, turning to him peremptorily, as soon as they were settled, demanded:

"Now, Mr. Christopher Royle, please tell me all."

"I should hate to," protested Christopher in alarm.

"It sounds a tall order, Mary," said his host in mild rebuke.

"Of course it's tall," said Mary. "I should hope so, indeed. It is no good, Mr. Royle, I am devoured by curiosity, and there is something about you . . . shall I say something rich and strange?"

"Have I suffered a sea change?" wondered Christopher.

"Good!" Mrs. Winter's smile approved him. "Though I always did think 'The Tempest' rather fatuous," she said. "You see, I lived for some years in Burma and there is no mistaking the Englishman who has been much abroad. He has lost that air of dark suspicion which our stay-at-home men wear with such gusto. Oh, it's no use looking at Austin. He hasn't got it."

"Torn from me, tooth and nail," mourned Austin.

"You lost it in the War," said Miss Eden to the rector. "So did Mr. Royle, of course, in spite of Mary and her Burmas."

"It isn't fair," complained Christopher. "Misers who grow cabbages and roses have no business to practice witchcraft as a side-line. I shall inform the Misers' Union. But do go on, Mrs. Winter. Are we really such suspicious creatures? It is quite true that I have been abroad for some years, but I am sorry it has labelled me so indelibly."

"Don't be sorry," begged Mary humorously," at

least till after dinner, for it has enabled you to make friends with lunatic strangers such as Austin and me."

"Then I shall wear it triumphantly ever after. You know I might with luck have met you in Burma, for I was there for a few months in 1920. The rest of the time I spent in Central Africa."

"Really? Not exploring, I think." Mary considered him. "You have too much imagination."

"Or too little curiosity."

"The same thing. . . . Perhaps you were big game shooting?"

Christopher shook his head.

"Only in self-defence and then I didn't hit the poor things."

"Androcles!"

"Not a bit of it . . . sheer funk. The only lion I ever met looked as horrified as I felt."

"In fact," said Mary,

"The lion and the hunter met
And neither one was slain,
The man ran off with all his might,
The lion with all his mane."

"After this," said Christopher laughing, "my real job will sound like bathos. I was on a coffee plantation. Six months ago the chap who owned it sold out and I joined a mad expedition after ivory."

"That sounds thrilling enough. I hope you found some."

"Really, Mary," protested the rector. "This is becoming a regular inquisition."

"Not a bit of it," Christopher reassured him. And then to Mary: "I was saved the suspense of finding out, as I came into some property at home and deserted. I hope the other chaps have made good, but I am not adventurous. In a few weeks, when my place is ready for me, I am going to follow Miss Eden's example and become a miser . . . in other words, plant everything on the face of the earth."

Across the table Miss Eden's glance met Christopher's in quick interest, and Mary, noting it, smiled with content.

"I rather like that," she said. "Impossibilities are always so attractive; but don't tell me any more, Mr. Royle, or I shall think this really has been an inquisition and I have almost asked you your income. You see, I wanted a picture of you and now you shall have your revenge. By the way, I wasn't in Burma in 1920 but before the War. That's where I caught Austin. Clever of me, wasn't it?"

"I won't let you take all the credit," protested the rector, indignantly.

"Oh, why not?" said Miss Eden. "Don't pretend Mary was ever coy. I couldn't bear it. Besides, the idea that it's a woman's province to wait meekly till called for, so to speak, is dreadfully antique. We have to work for a living nowadays like everybody else."

"The modernist denies romance in marriage," said Austin, shaking his head at her.

"You at least ought not to consider it modern to tell the truth," she retorted. "There's romance in the world, but not in marriage, I think, except perhaps yours and Mary's, and even that is more like understanding. All the great romances have ended in tragedy and death."

"Oh, no, no."

"Yes, they have."

"The world has remembered only those that did end in tragedy, my dear, because we have a sense of the dramatic. There is no drama in happiness," said the rector.

"Austin, that is a perfectly hateful doctrine," exclaimed his wife, "and I won't allow it. I intend to have drama in my happiness."

"Of course you shall," said Christopher, "and it won't be a tragic drama either."

"Oh, dear, he means it will be a farce," cried Mary.

"Certainly not. It will be an intellectual comedy and it will have an enormous run."

"You know, I rather like you, Christopher Royle," said Mrs. Winter, regarding him seriously, and then joined in the laughter of the other three.

There was no talk of the Manor during dinner, and Christopher thanked his stars for that, yet as soon as he and his host were alone, he began to wonder whether it had been deliberately avoided, for the other man turned to him at once and said:

"You went, I hope, to see Mrs. Willingdon."

"Yes," said Christopher rather reluctantly, "and met the Colonel for a few moments. I am afraid he is very ill."

The rector nodded.

"He has been in broken health since the War, a man with a keen mind who has lost touch with life. It seems a pitiful waste. He rarely leaves the house . . . has hardly been well enough to leave it during the eight years I've known him. I go over and play chess with him occasionally, when he's well enough, and he beats me every time, which he thinks is as it should be. Strategy, he says, is a soldier's province. In a parson it would be a vice."

"Then, if you have only been here for eight years," said Christopher with assumed carelessness, "I suppose you didn't know the soldier son?"

"Young Willingdon, no. He seems to have been a most attractive youngster too. Miss Eden, of course, knew him well."

"Did she really?"

The young man was immediately interested and Austin Winter, naturally misunderstanding the reason for that, rather veered off the subject.

"Oh, well, they were children together," he said. "What did you think of the Window?"

"It promises to be rather fine, doesn't it? Not that I know much about stained glass, and the subject stumped me altogether, but I gather Mrs. Willingdon thinks it might represent St. George in his off moments, without the dragon."

The two men exchanged a smile.

"At least the subject it commemorates is clear enough," said Austin.

"Yes, and yet you know I prefer your village shrine, and I fancy that must have been your choice."

"I was allowed some voice in the matter, certainly," admitted Austin. "It was given to the village by the lord of the manor, Sir Peter Duffield, who is, unfortunately, an absentee."

"Is that some relative of the Miss Duffield I met this afternoon?"

"Yes, her father. She is devoted to Mrs. Willingdon, and spends some of her time there, only occasionally joining Sir Peter abroad. Incidentally, she dispenses his generosity to the poor of the parish, but I am afraid Mrs. Willingdon gets most of the credit. You know what villages are, and she has . . . very charmingly, of course . . . what one might call the feudal touch. The people are devoted to her."

"Good lord," thought Christopher, "who isn't?" Then immediately answered his own question. Mary Winter, at least, downright to the finger tips, was not under the dominion of the beautiful old woman; nor the rector either, perhaps, though he would never say so.

What a particularly nice chap he was! Christopher liked a man with a clear mind, and this one was unhampered, or at least unridden, by his difficult calling. He had an impulse to confide in Aus-

tin Winter, hypothetically, the problem in which he was involved, feeling sure his advice would be both sane and helpful.

And yet, he saw, there was danger in that. Until he knew everything there was to be known and perhaps even after, the only safe course was to keep silent.

iii

As they waited for the men to join them, Mary Winter said to Patricia Eden:

"Well, aren't you glad you came after all?"

"I refuse to rhapsodize," said the girl firmly.

"Oh, why?"

"I have lost the art, I think," answered Patricia after a moment.

"Nonsense, you donkey . . . and, in any case, it will soon come back. Michael will bring it, if nobody else, the darling."

"Rhapsodizing is one of the things Michael of all people shall never have to bear from me," exclaimed Patricia, with determination.

Mrs. Winter glanced at her quickly, then strolled across the room to get herself a cigarette.

"It's none of my business," she said at last, "but do you think it's quite fair to Michael to make so few demands upon him?"

"Few demands? I make dozens," declared Patricia. "All the demands that a friend might make. But I *won't* have Michael tied to my apron strings."

There was such a sudden passion in her voice

that Mary caught her breath, thinking: "I knew it; I was certain of it. He's Terry Willingdon's son. Oh, my darling Pat!" But aloud she said reasonably:

"I'm with you there, my dear, and so I think would Christopher Royle be. He doesn't strike me as a man who would have much time for apron strings."

"Then why," said Patricia with humor, "are you trying, you lunatic, to tie him to mine?"

"Nothing of the kind." Mrs. Winter turned a face all injured innocence upon her guest. "I simply want you to be friends," she said.

"What time have I for friendships . . . except yours and Austin's?"

"Everybody's first duty should be to make time for friendships. . . . Note for Austin's next sermon. . . . Besides, you have so much in common. When he is growing whatever it is and wherever it is . . . how foolish of me not to have asked him that . . . and you are growing roses at Woden, think how many ideas you could profitably exchange . . . to say nothing of seeds and so on."

"Wait till he hears what the village has to say about me, Mary."

"Damn the village! Do you think he's the man to listen to a lot of village idiots?"

"The whole world listens when the news is bad," said Patricia drily.

"Then I'll tell him a very different story and I'll take care that he listens to me."

Patricia Eden jumped to her feet in alarm, seizing her friend and shaking her indignantly.

"I like him," she said, "oh, I'll admit it, as a passing friendly acquaintance, but what room is there in my life for anything more than that? It's so obvious. Promise me you won't tell him anything. Oh, promise."

"What could I tell him," said Mary gently, "except that you are the finest woman I have ever known?"

"Good heavens . . . that would finish him. It would be fatal. He'd run for his life," cried Patricia.

They were laughing when Austin Winter and Christopher Royle entered the room.

CHAPTER VII

i

CHRISTOPHER set off for Woden to fish next morning, hoping that he might have the luck during the day to see Miss Eden again. It was improbable, he felt, yet greatly to be desired, because she had known Terry Willingdon long ago and there must be much that she could tell him, if only, without seeming to do so, he could bring the conversation about.

He did not admit any other interest in Miss Eden at the moment and yet, as the golden morning slipped away, he thought of her a great deal. She was an unusual girl and plucky too, growing her roses and selling them to keep the place together. Christopher with his property sense was moved by that. A quiet and rather still girl, yet lovely when she smiled.

A sudden barking near at hand made him turn at this point in his meditations and he found the old English sheep dog making a great fuss at the foot of one of the trees overhanging the stream. At the same moment a hushed voice exclaimed:

"Blinkers, lie down, sir. Lie down."

The dog subsided immediately, pointing, however, a plaintive nose toward the branches of the

tree. Christopher, putting down his rod, went to investigate, and presently, far up among the green, met the bright eyes of Blinkers' lord and master.

"Hullo!" he said. "You're a quiet sort of chap to get up there without making a sound."

"I've been here *hours,*" said Michael, still in the same hushed voice, "not to disturb you, you know, because I wanted to watch you fish. Blinkers is a very quiet dog when he's told. I hope you don't mind awfully having a dog about?"

"Not a bit, old man. Blinkers, so that's his name?"

Christopher proceeded to make friends with Blinkers, who returned the compliment in a stately manner. Since the god talked to this creature, he must be all right.

"He's a good sort of a dog," proceeded Michael. And then, wistfully, "I suppose you do hate awfully being talked to when you're fishing, don't you?"

"Between you and me, I rather like it," Christopher answered this appeal, and the little boy cried with a whoop of delight:

"Oh, I say, how ripping! I'm coming down."

He came at such a speed that his new friend stared at him in flattering amazement.

"Bit of a human whirlwind, aren't you?" he said.

"Oh, well," said Michael grinning, "you see I'm used to trees."

"Lucky young beggar. Holidays, I suppose?"

"Yes, isn't it a lark? I came home yesterday and Blinkers and I always go round the place first

thing. We began yesterday after you left off fishing and we are going to finish to-day. We see everything."

"That's right . . . keeping an eye on the estate, eh? You are the man of the house, I suppose?"

"Oh well, I say I am, but *they* laugh," admitted Michael.

"Yes, families do, don't they?" agreed Christopher without a smile and, upon this note of common understanding, friendship began.

"My name is Michael Eden," remarked the man of the house.

"Mine is Christopher Royle," the visitor replied with becoming courtesy, and Michael considered this and seemed to approve of it.

"Christopher was a saint who looked after travelers, wasn't he?" he remarked. "I know because my Aunt Mary has one on her car and you simply can't run into people then, she says. She's not my real aunt . . . a sort of borrowed one, but I like her."

"Handy things, aunts," agreed Christopher. "I used to have one."

"Did you, really? What . . . what become of her?" inquired Michael, deeply interested.

"Oh, well, if it comes to that I suppose I have her still, but perhaps I have grown out of her. Some aunts are like that."

Michael nodded, as one man to another.

A long and earnest discussion on flies followed and they were deep in the middle of it, with Blinkers

cocking an intelligent ear beside them, when somebody called: "Michael . . . Michael."

"Hullo!" shouted the little boy in answer and Christopher, turning with delight, saw Miss Eden hurrying towards them.

"Oh, Michael, it's too bad of you," she said reproachfully.

"But he likes it, he does really," cried Michael in eager self-defense. "He doesn't in the least mind being talked to, do you, Mr. Royle?"

"Mind?" said Christopher. "On the contrary, I insist upon it."

"Mr. Royle is being polite, Michael, but it isn't cricket, old man. We have let him the fishing, and we must leave him in peace."

"Peace," said Christopher promptly, "bores me to tears. It's all right, Michael, your sister is quite mistaken."

The small boy and the girl exchanged a sudden secret smile of understanding. Christopher could not gauge the meaning of it, but he thought it charming.

"Mrs. Cope has an orange for you, Michael," said the girl. "Better go and get it or she will be hurt. She has been looking for you everywhere."

"But I can come back, can't I?" said Michael, dashing off, with Blinkers at his heels.

"Of course he must come back," said Christopher to Miss Eden. "Michael and I are going to see a lot of each other, I hope. In fact, I think it ought to be considered in the contract."

She smiled, then looked at him with a very steady glance.

"Mr. Royle, Michael is not my brother. He is my adopted son," she said.

Christopher, rather staggered, yet had the presence of mind to say:

"He's a jolly lucky chap, then."

"That's a matter of opinion. Most people would think it the height of folly for an unmarried woman to try to bring up a boy. But I couldn't make a greater mess of it," she added passionately, "than some mothers I have known."

"You are making a howling success of it, if Michael up to date is any criterion," said Christopher sincerely. "He's a delightful youngster. And I am quite serious about the fishing really, Miss Eden. Don't keep him away from the river just because I happen to be hanging about. I remember what it was like when I was a kid to be chivvied away from my favorite haunts, and I'm not such a keen fisherman that I want a sort of religious silence. Michael and Blinkers make a bit of life about the place."

The girl considered him curiously.

"What kind of sport have you had so far?" she asked him, changing the subject.

"Oh, splendid, thanks."

"Mr. Royle, what a fraud you are! I don't believe you have caught a single fish."

"Caught it?" echoed Christopher, "but that's not sport . . . or only the smallest part of it. The

sport is in loafing along the river bank, kidding yourself that you are going to catch one in a minute, and smoking a pipe and having a blissful time in general."

"You're a mystery to me," she said, shaking her head. "I can't imagine why you ever took the fishing."

"Perhaps you don't know what it is to come home after years abroad and find your own place still in the hands of outsiders, and to have the chance of sneaking into somebody else's garden and enjoying yourself till the coast's clear," said Christopher guilefully.

"Why, you poor dear, then of course you can come into my garden," exclaimed the girl in impulsive sympathy, "but that deal about the fishing is off. You are not going to pay for fishing that you never have."

"Oh, but look here, I'm going to have it, as soon as I really get started. Why, Michael and I will have all the fish out of the Severn before we're done. Here's the old lad back again. Come on, Michael. You and I have work to do."

"I got two oranges," said Michael, joyfully. "Catch!"

Christopher caught.

"You see, you have two kids on your hands instead of one," he said to Miss Eden, and she laughed and turned back towards the house. Then seeing the little boy run out of ear-shot after Blinkers, for a moment, she returned.

"Michael knows," she said. "About not being my brother, I mean. I thought I'd better tell you."

"You are a perfect brick," said Christopher.

ii

Patricia Eden went back to her roses, half elated, half depressed. She had not intended Michael to make friends with Christopher Royle, but since it had come about, it seemed hard to deny him the pleasure of it, hard and perhaps stupid too, and stupidities were things she was always desperately trying to avoid in her relation with the little boy.

She had told Christopher Royle what that relation was because she was determined Michael should not sail under false colors with his friends except to such an extent as the circumstances made unavoidable. Besides, what story might he not have already heard? As soon as he was old enough to understand anything, she had told Michael himself, so that he should grow up in the knowledge that his position was unusual and therefore feel less shock when a censorious world began to point it out to him. Michael knew that his father had been a soldier who died for his country; that his mother had died soon afterwards, and Patricia, knowing them both and being an orphan herself, had thought it a good idea that the two orphans should make a family for each other.

Michael admired her reasoning as he admired most things in Patricia. He thought it had been a jolly good idea.

Aunt Eleanor, the girl's only relative, took a different view.

Miss Eleanor Eden, after living with her brother at Woden for years, had tactfully married when Patricia was eighteen, leaving the girl the mistress of her father's house. Marriage had made her at once more amiable and more worldly, and when, after the War, Patricia wrote to her that she had adopted a soldier's orphaned son, she came hurrying to Woden.

"But, my dear, how noble of you and how very awkward," said Aunt Eleanor.

Patricia denied both adjectives with heat.

"Unless, of course," added her aunt, "one can definitely place the child . . . his father was one of the So-and-So's, you know, of such and such a place and his mother was connected with the Thingamys. That sort of thing."

"I am not adopting the child's relatives," said Patricia to this.

"No, dear," said Aunt Eleanor with regret. "Well, there you are. . . . You do see the difficulty, don't you? My niece, Patricia Eden, and the little boy she has adopted! And people will say 'How beautiful!' and draw their own conclusions. In this world you may be almost anything but noble. It makes people feel uncomfortable and a little inferior and of course they will not believe it. They will think you have been modern or immoral, according to which particular niche of society they happen to occupy."

"Dear me, you'd better drop me, Aunt Eleanor," said Patricia.

"Don't be foolish, child. I'm very fond of you and, besides, I know the facts. But I do feel you have been rather headstrong and just a wee bit sentimental. Surely there are Homes for these poor babes who are left?"

"Homes?" cried Patricia, flaring. (A Home for Terry Willingdon's son!) And then she laughed. "Yes, Woden is going to be a home for one of them," she said.

She had seen little of her aunt since then, though they corresponded occasionally and Christmas and birthday presents arrived from her as usual. From these Michael was not omitted and as soon as he went to school, the elder woman placed a standing order with Fortnum and Mason's to send him a hamper every term, "From Aunt Eleanor."

"It's pretty decent of her when she's never even seen me, isn't it?" said Michael.

Patricia agreed that it was. Her aunt's wordliness here was both kind and deliberate, she felt sure. She would know how substantial gifts from his people insensibly increase a youngster's standing among his fellows at school.

The old days when her aunt had presided at Woden seemed very far away to Patricia Eden now . . . strange, unbelievable, carefree old days of tennis parties and little dances and constant friendly intercourse between Highways, Woden and Dorne. Sir Peter Duffield, bluff and beneficent; Doris coming

home occasionally, plain and finicky, but oh, so beautifully dressed, from her expensive school; Aunt Eleanor, knitting with the old rector's wife and dosing and disapproving of the village; her father and the Colonel quarreling over campaigns in rich enjoyment; and in the center, always Mrs. Willingdon!

How they had all admired and deferred to her . . . except Patricia, who, with the passionate impatience of youth, had hated her for the strangle hold she kept upon her son.

Poor Terry! With his passing, so much else had passed. The old rector and his wife were dead. The War had taken her father and broken the Colonel's health and fortune. Sir Peter rarely came to Highways now; and though Patricia, going over to the Rectory, sometimes saw Doris and Mrs. Willingdon driving in the Highways car, she looked the other way. She could pity Doris, though such a sentiment towards the superior child she remembered seemed slightly ridiculous, but she still hated Mrs. Willingdon. She always rejoiced that the tall old Manor pew concealed its occupants so completely, for she would have felt it discourteous to Austin to bring her hatred into his church. She herself had her doubts about religion, but she endeavored to be orthodox for Michael's sake. She was determined not to bias him on this or any subject, and by and by he could judge for himself.

For nearly nine years there had been no communication between Woden and the Manor, and Pa-

tricia had contrived never to meet the Willingdons face to face. Circumstances made this easy, for Mrs. Willingdon spent much time away visiting friends and relatives in other parts of England, and at home, ostensibly on account of the Colonel's health, she entertained no more. He, poor old man, never went out, even in the Duffields' car. Patricia sometimes wondered at that, but he had always been a strange man, she thought. Even Terry had not known him very well.

Her own days had been full, caring for Michael; helping Mrs. Cope, the one woman servant she had been able to afford, besides his nurse when he was too young to do without one; and growing her roses and vegetables for market. The friendship of Austin and Mary Winter provided the only social life she knew and she neither needed nor had time for any other. Yet once, like every girl before her, she had asked so much of life, and what had it brought her? . . . Another woman's child.

Patricia's mind went back to that December of 1918, when she had brought the baby Michael home (though she had not seen it in that light at the time, nor had he been Michael then. They had christened him Michael Eden and arranged the rest in the drawing room at Woden a year later, after Austin Winter had come to Dorne). There had been one very dark place in that home-coming, but Patricia would not think of that; she thrust it aside. And later, when she had decided it must be a home-com-

ing for Michael as well as herself, there had been bright places too. The world, just after the Armistice, was talking with sentimental kindness about war-orphans, and Miss Eden's announcement that she had taken a soldier's son to bring up had seemed to confer a sort of distinction on the neighborhood. The baby at Woden for a little while had been a person of importance.

Then the poison had begun to work. Patricia was bitterly aware of its origin, though she never mentioned that.

"War orphan, indeed!" sniffed the village righteously. She could laugh at it now . . . at her very helplessness, but at least it had been a consolation that, while condemning her, they had had no suspicion of Michael's real parentage.

And now she was suddenly faced with the growing danger of that, for Michael was changing. In one short term his little boyhood had slipped away and a dozen times in the last twenty-four hours there had looked out at her the bright, mischievous glance of her childhood's friend. Then a cold hand of fear had seemed laid upon her heart. It was not for Terry's sake that she minded now, and not for the Willingdons'. Oh, passionately she knew that, but for Michael's own, for why should he have this dishonor put upon him by the hard and knowing glances of the people of Dorne? While they knew nothing, they could suspect what they pleased, but wasn't Michael, even now, carrying the knowledge to them in his face? She could not always keep him

away from the village, though she did encourage him as much as possible to find his pleasures at home. And here Christopher Royle's friendship for the lad would help, if the friendship lasted and while he remained at Dorne. But perhaps, when he came to think it over, Christopher would take himself off out of the neighborhood and find another garden in which to loaf and dream.

What had he thought of her announcement? she wondered. He would have felt it odd, at least, and every man hates oddness in a woman. And presently, when the hints of the village filtered through to him . . . if they had not done so already . . . he would put the obvious interpretation on it. How could she blame him, and that, perhaps, would be the end.

Patricia had no delusions as to our so-called modern attitude to such matters. There is still one thing which the average man cannot forgive in a woman, though he may condone it in a fellow man.

Her eyes alight with self-derision, she laughed suddenly. Here she was worrying lest a man she hardly knew could not forgive her for something she had never done.

Yet, all her common sense notwithstanding, the worry persisted and, marching side by side with it, a faint hope that he would not take the common view. There were some clear-sighted people who could accept a simple fact without twisting into it the baser metal of suspicion and evil. Austin and Mary Winter had shown her that. And she had liked

Christopher Royle. Throughout the dinner at the Rectory, and again this morning, she had had a feeling that here was a man.

Across the garden, running like the wind, came Michael.

"Pat, I say, Pat, we've caught one. Isn't it great?" he shouted, rushing past her on some mysterious errand into the house.

She smiled, but again that cold hand was clutching at her heart, and she seemed to see, not Michael but the Terry of long ago escaped for the moment from his mother's apron-strings . . . poor Terry, held in thrall by a woman's amazing vanity and selfishness.

Well, Michael should never have that handicap, whatever else he had.

He was out again, rushing back to his new friend with something which she could not identify huddled beneath his arm, and flashing an impish smile at her as he went.

Peace came to her; for, after all, wasn't it much to know that here where the Terry of old had spent his happiest moments, there was growing up a new Terry with a better chance?

Patricia was whistling happily over her work a few moments later when Maginnis, back from an errand for Mrs. Cope at Dorne, appeared round the bend of the drive.

"I'm after thinking the Windy's come that Herself at the Manor has been waiting for, Miss Pat," said Maginnis, pausing beside her.

"No?" said Patricia startled. "Has it really, Maginnis?"

"It has that, Miss, for I seen the crate with my two eyes and me passing the churchyard half an hour since. Fine doings there'll be soon, I'm thinking."

"Yes, indeed."

Patricia watched the man go off on his way to Mrs. Cope, with absent eyes, for here were doubts and troubles gathering round her again. She had never really believed in the Window; neither, she knew, had Mary, for it had been promised so often and talked about for so long. Yet if it had really come at last, there was another complication to be faced.

Even Austin Winter did not know the truth of Michael's birth. Patricia had kept rigidly silent for nine years and had always intended to keep silent to the end. She detested that sentimental feminine impulse that bids a woman tell even when the secret she holds is not her own. But now with the new fact of Michael's growing likeness to his father before her, was she not possibly betraying Austin by keeping to her rule?

And so often in the past years, she felt weighted by her inexperience. How, she wondered, did the world regard these things; how, above all, did the church? for they were to consecrate this Window at St. Michael's to the undying honor of Terry Willingdon; and here was at least one evidence of his dishonor growing up in their midst.

Patricia herself did not think this important, for the Window would commemorate great qualities which Terry Willingdon had undoubtedly possessed. His physical bravery had been undeniable, and his deeds of valor had been witnessed and his praises sung by half the lads of Dorne. Wasn't it less a memorial to Terry Willingdon the man than to the undying glory of his race?

She thought so, but others might not, and she was suddenly appalled to think that Austin might be held up to obloquy because she had kept silent and he did not know. That at least must never be. Rather than risk it, if risk there were, she and Michael must leave Dorne, whatever it might cost.

She knew well what the cost would be, having counted it so often in the past. It would for many reasons have been better to go long ago, but the place had so small a market value in these difficult times, and for the few thousands she could hope to get for it, what sort of home could she give the child instead? . . . A small villa in a suburban street, or worse, instead of this healthy outdoor life in the garden at Woden and the woods at Dorne.

"Oh, dear," she thought, "why didn't Austin see Michael yesterday, and I might have guessed from his face. But he must see him immediately. I think I'll send over a note and trust to inspiration when the time comes. If I must tell him I must."

Lest her resolution should fail, she went into the house and began:

"Dear Austin,

"I am bothered about a small business matter and as usual want your brotherly advice. If you happen to be anywhere in the neighborhood, will you look in for a few minutes?

"Tell Mary Michael has made friends with Mr. Royle in spite of my indignant protests and is 'helping' him to fish, though how he can expect to catch anything with Michael and Blinkers dogging his footsteps, I haven't the faintest idea.

"My love to you both,

"Pat."

She gave the note to Maginnis, told him to cycle over to Dorne with it after luncheon and was returning to the garden just as Michael rushed in to lay his trophy at her feet.

"There," he said, "it's yours. Our first catch, and Mr. Royle says you've got to have it, because you are the lady of the house."

"But Michael, darling, we can't take it. We can't really," protested Patricia in dismay. "You shouldn't have let him give it to you and you certainly shouldn't have got him a plate."

"Oh, well, we had to show you we really could catch one," said Michael, "and anyway it's too late to give it back because he's gone."

"Gone?" echoed Patricia, and there was sadness in the thought of what that might mean.

"Of course he's coming back though," Michael admitted reluctantly.

"Oh, very well. Give it to Mrs. Cope, old man, but never again. I must speak very severely to Mr. Christopher Royle, if he does come back."

"He'll only laugh," Michael assured her wisely. "I like him."

iii

Meanwhile the morning had provided an even more startling revelation for Christopher Royle than Pat, with all her fears, could have possibly imagined. It was true he had thought her disclosure about the youngster odd, but it was not an oddness that antagonized him, because, with that perceptiveness which Mary Winter had noted in him, he had felt from the first that she was an unusual woman and one whom it would be a pleasure to know. And the very implication which her words might seem to convey, made them a tribute not only to her own rare courage but to his understanding. He felt that she had taken him into her confidence and was grateful.

Yet with that queer blindness which sometimes besets us at critical moments, it never entered his head that here was the pivot of Terry Willingdon's story; and so, when the first fish was caught and Michael exclaimed excitedly:

"What a sell for Pat," he was almost startled out of his wits.

"Eh?" said Christopher stupidly, "Pat?" He was seeing a girl's letter and a great light breaking. Funny that he hadn't heard Miss Eden's christian

name before and hadn't expected this, for of course she had been young Willingdon's friend.

"Did you say Miss Eden's name was Pat, old man?" he asked.

Michael nodded.

"Rather a decent name, I think," he said offhandedly. "Don't you?"

As the little boy's anxious glance melted at the other's quick assent into a beaming smile, the light became almost a conflagration for Christopher Royle.

A man dying of fever in Central Africa; a boy's photograph in the drawing room at Dorne; and Michael Eden.

"God," thought Christopher. "What a girl!"

CHAPTER VIII

i

CHRISTOPHER ROYLE had no longer an impulse to run from Dorne. The very knowledge which Patricia half feared might send him away inevitably held him fast, for it was a wider knowledge than she guessed. He was the onlooker seeing most of the game, but still imperfectly because he had come late and did not know the players.

"Yet not quite an onlooker," he thought whimsically, pursuing the parable as he went back to the Inn for lunch, "because, hang it all, I hold some diamonds."

It seemed to him that a sort of unity was coming into the story of Terry Willingdon. Pat Eden hoarding her treasure of roses in the garden at Woden; he, poor chap, hoarding his diamonds in Central Africa! Surely it had been for the same end. But that would suppose that she at least knew he had not died in France. Christopher hoped so, for it would make his own play clear at last. The ruin of Dorne Manor, the Window to a hero had receded into the background. His concern was with the hero's son.

Practical considerations claimed Christopher's

attention over luncheon. The diamonds ought to be valued by an expert; he had left them with his bank in town. It had also been in his mind that the War Office would probably provide him with an account of Terry Willingdon's official end or alternatively deny it and this information Mr. Ponder, no doubt, could obtain for him. He could tell the old boy he was inquiring for a friend in Africa, which was essentially true. He thought he had better get these things in trim at once . . . run up to London in the car next day perhaps. It would be a bore, of course; and yet, why not take young Michael along, if Miss Eden could be persuaded to consent to the expedition. Christopher chuckled at the thought of the argument which was likely to ensue about this. They had jumped into argument from the very first moment of encounter, he and she, which is, after all, the soundest road to friendship. He found it hard to remember that he had actually known her less than twenty-four hours.

Old Towner, who loved a gossip, looked into the dining room as he was finishing his lunch. Towner very naturally wanted to keep his guest as long as possible, and he now possessed an item of news which might, he thought, lead to this end.

"You having been a soldier, sir, will be interested in the new window at St. Michael's," he said. "It's going to be erected to the memory of young Captain Willingdon of the Manor, and with a bit of luck you'll be here for the Dedication. It will be a great affair from all accounts . . . the

Lord Bishop, the Colonel of the regiment and more than likely the regimental band. The lads'll be polishing up their war medals, for the wife tells me the workmen are already in the church. She's been having a good cry about it, thinking of our Bill. Always following Mr. Terry about, he was, from a little lad, and nothing would do him but he must follow him to France."

"I saw your boy's name on the cross in the village," said Christopher sympathetically. "I suppose you knew this Captain Willingdon all his life?"

"That I did," said Towner, "and a precious pickle he was as a lad, when he could escape from his lady mother . . . up all the trees in the place, risking his neck and Miss Pat with him. There's an old chalk pit the other side of Dorne woods and I mind the time when they tried to climb down it . . . not a day over ten they couldn't have been, and got stuck half way and had to be hauled up with ropes. And my Bill howling his eyes out at the top because his legs was too short and they wouldn't let him risk his neck. Mother, she used to get into a proper state over Bill, but there, as I said to her, you can't coddle a lad, and if Master Terry had had a bit more freedom, there wouldn't have been so much of the devil in him bottled up and waiting to get out."

"Mrs. Willingdon was strict with him then?" suggested Christopher to draw the old man out.

"Not what you'd call strict, she wasn't, so much as anxious, always wanting him under her eyes,"

said Towner. "Some ladies are like that and, after all, you can't blame 'em. Not but what Mr. Terry wasn't devoted to his ma. He fair worshipped her, but I do say a young lad should be sent to school with other lads, and that she wouldn't have. Nothing would do but the old rector must learn him, and what sort of life is that, I ask you, Mr. Royle, for a growing boy? I don't hold with it. Now, Miss Pat, it was different with her. She could have done with a bit of coddling in my opinion, but her father when he'd caught her at some mischief with Master Terry as usual, he up and said: 'Off you go to school, my girl,' and off she went, and she'd come back on her holidays full of such tales as you never heard."

"Who is Miss Pat, then?" inquired Christopher, lest the recital should cease.

"Why, that's Miss Eden, sir, her that you've got the fishing off, and a rare kind young lady she is too. When Bill was killed she come all the way from London a purpose to see Mother and cried like a child. If he'd been her own brother she couldn't have felt it more."

"And her other old playmate was killed too?"

"Yes, that must have been a rare grief to Miss Pat. She wasn't here at the time nor for some years previous. Her father being on the reserve was taken for training in Ireland and Miss Pat went with him. Then the Major, he died towards the end of the war and she came to London and worked in a hospital. The Captain, that is to say,

Mr. Terry, of course, got engaged to Miss Duffield, the young lady at Highways, but it's my private opinion his heart wasn't in it, though Mother, she'd tick me off proper for saying so. Young Bill thought so too, as I know well. He used to worry about the Captain, did Bill. Too blame reckless, he said, and yet, as you might think, bearing a charmed life up to the very last day. Funny thing Fate saving up her spite for a man like that. Must have her little joke, must Fate," said Towner, and then was summarily called off by "Mother," who was, Christopher had noticed, very much the gray mare and disapproved of gossiping husbands.

"Talk, talk, talk, yo'd talk the dog's hind leg off," said Mother. "The gentleman will be sick to death of you."

The gentleman was nothing of the kind, for under old Towner's hand the story of Terry Willingdon had unfolded still further . . . enough at least to range Christopher, as ever, on the side of the prodigal.

There had been several significant points in the discourse too. If the Colonel of the regiment had consented to be present at the Dedication, it seemed clear that the hero's death in France must be official as far as the world knew, and as far as the Willingdons knew also, probably. Christopher still inclined to the view that Pat knew something more, and that if Terry Willingdon's secret were in her hands, it would stay there. She struck him as a woman who would guard it well. There must have

been a very strong bond between them, for a man does not carry a girl's letter for years, particularly a letter that may conceivably betray him, without a strong sentimental reason. The lad must have loved her, and she . . . ?

Scraps of her talk came back to him. "Romance always ends in tragedy and death," she had said. She had spoken without bitterness but with a great conviction; yet she had taken Terry Willingdon's son, and here was another puzzle. Had she done so openly or were they all blind at Dorne? Were the Willingdons and the Winters?

He gave it up, for he was getting out of his depth.

ii

"Mr. Royle, you're dreadful," said Patricia.

She had caught sight of him crossing the garden and borne down upon him reproachfully.

"I know you meant it kindly, but if it happens again that contract, as you call it, will be off. I really can't let you pay for the fishing and give me the catch."

"But that was only to prove I could catch a fish. You must admit you doubted it, and I have my pride," said Christopher. "Besides, what could I do with the poor thing? You wouldn't have liked me to throw it back into the river."

"You could have taken it to the Inn for your lunch, of course."

"And hurt Mrs. Towner's feelings? She would

have thought it was a hint that she was not giving me enough to eat. No, it is most unlucky not to give the first catch to a lady. It's like the fox's brush."

"Then," said Pat firmly, "you could have sent it off to a friend."

"But I don't possess any friends . . . except of course Michael and Blinkers and Mr. and Mrs. Winter . . . and, I hope, Miss Eden," finished Christopher with a disarming smile.

"You do rather rush into your friendships, don't you?"

"Oh, always . . . head first. Would you have me be cold and calculating?"

"I'd have you be . . . oh, I wouldn't have you be anything. Don't be ridiculous," cried Pat indignantly, rushing away.

"Won't I though?" said Christopher to himself, looking after her with admiration. "Miss Pat Eden, you're a darling, unless I'm much mistaken."

Darling or not, he supposed he would see no more of her this afternoon, and the question of the trip to town was still unbroached. However, he could scribble a note and send it in to her by Michael, for it did not seem quite fair to mention it to the youngster, lest he should be disappointed if she did not consent.

A little after four Patricia solved the question by coming down to the stream to bring him a cup of tea.

"This is coals of fire," he exclaimed. "It's much too good of you, Miss Eden."

"Tit for tat," she retorted, "though a very feeble one. Come along, Michael, old man. Tea's ready."

"Couldn't I bring mine out?" said Michael.

"Not this time. I am expecting your Uncle Austin and you haven't seen him yet, but you can come back later, if Mr. Royle isn't tired of you."

"Tired of my chief assistant? Certainly not," declared Christopher. "By the way, Miss Eden, I wonder if you would be good enough to lend me something to-morrow?"

"Of course," she said unsuspectingly. "What is it?"

"Well, it's Blinkers, as a matter of fact."

"Blinkers?"

"Yes, you see, I have to run up to town and a car looks so unfurnished without a dog, I always think."

She looked at him very hard, trying not to laugh.

"As far as I am concerned, you may have the loan of Blinkers," she said, "but I don't quite know how he will look at it."

Michael, who had been listening, very bright of eye, put in apologetically:

"You see he's rather a funny dog and he doesn't much like leaving me."

"But surely, you'd be a pal and come and keep him company, wouldn't you?" exclaimed Christo-

pher in a surprised tone. "You'd never make me go dogless to London?"

"Oh, Pat, it's a joke! Do let me. I may go, mayn't I?" cried Michael excitedly.

Pat, however, with one hand on the little boy's arm, was attending to the joker.

"You really are the most absurd person I have ever met," she said.

"By Jove, am I? That's splendid. I always like to be unique, because then you won't forget me, will you?"

"You certainly haven't given me much chance to forget you during our long acquaintance," said Miss Eden drily.

And Christopher laughed and said:

"Score to you. But this is awful. I am keeping you from your tea. Then it is all arranged, isn't it, Michael and Blinkers come to town with me tomorrow. I'll take the greatest care of them and we shan't be late . . . about six, probably, if I may call for them as early as nine in the morning."

"Oh, dear, you go too fast," said Patricia. "I'll . . . I'll think it over."

She had need for time to do that, for the interview with the rector was immediately before her, and so much might depend upon the outcome of it. Patricia Eden was a shy woman and, in spite of her affection for Austin, she was dreading this interview more than she could have thought possible. Yet perhaps she was worrying herself unduly. If so, Austin would be able to advise her about the

trip to town. She did not quite know how to take this very precipitate young man.

Michael, she could see, considered the matter settled, and in high feather dashed through his tea and had already finished it when the rector was announced.

"So there you are, ruffian? How is the cricket?" Austin asked him.

"I think I'm going into the second eleven next term," said Michael cautiously.

"What, already? Poor old Hobbs."

"Oh, Uncle Austin, you do pull my leg."

"Nothing of the kind," said the rector severely. "That would be a most unclerical proceeding, and I'm really very sorry for Hobbs. One of these days I can see, I shall be strolling into Lord's and remarking in a loud voice: 'Had to come along and see that fellow Eden score his forty-ninth century. You know, he's a nephew of mine.' "

"And then," said Pat, "to pay you out for boasting, the Fates will get your graceless nephew bowled for a duck."

"Oh, I say, wouldn't it be a sell?" shouted Michael with glee.

"No, no, we must avoid that at all costs," declared the rector. "Don't forget, Mr. Eden, that I shall be charmed to bowl you at the nets in the Rectory meadow any morning. That is, if you can tear yourself away from this fellow Royle."

"Couldn't we ask him too?" said Michael eagerly. "Oh, Uncle Austin, may I?"

"Run along then," said Austin, "and tell the scoundrel I'll call for his answer in about half an hour when I've finished some business for Pat."

"Love at first sight evidently," he added smiling, as they watched Michael rushing away. "Still, I'm not altogether surprised. He's a nice chap, Royle."

"Yes, but I wish he wouldn't insist upon catching my fish and presenting them to me," said Pat. "It's dreadful; and when I argue with him about it, he is simply ridiculous. And now he wants to take Michael and Blinkers to town to-morrow for a run in the car. Do you think I ought to let them go?"

"I think you might. Is that what has been worrying you?"

"No, oh, no. He has only just suggested it."

Pat, having given her guest his tea, rose nervously and walked to the window.

"Do you see any change in Michael?" she asked, in what she hoped was a casual tone.

"There's rather more of him," said the rector easily. He gave her a quick glance, for he had been by no means blind to the meaning of his wife's hints of the day before and he was fairly sure Patricia's remarks were heading in the same direction. He was very fond of her, but he knew her reserve and this was delicate ground.

"I don't notice any change in Michael that I haven't seen coming for a long time, my dear," he said at last.

Patricia sat down again, for her knees were shaking.

"I never dreamt you had guessed," she said. "Austin, what am I to do? Ought I to take him away from here?"

"What, haul down your colors, Pat?"

"Oh, dear, am I being an awful fool?" asked the girl with a rather shaky laugh. "You see, it's the Window. Maginnis told me it had come and I've been in a blue funk ever since, for there is a change in Michael. I notice it every time he comes into the room, and if you and I do, other people must. And I was afraid it might make difficulties for you."

"If I were to banish from the parish everyone who made difficulties for me," said the rector humorously, "there would be very little parish left. As for any difficulties that young rascal may provide for me, surely it's my province as his godfather to bear them as best I can."

"Yes, but you didn't know what you were undertaking."

"One never does with a child of that age. I knew I was asked to be godfather to a dead soldier's son and it seemed to me an honor. It didn't matter what soldier, Pat. As for the Window, that of course is another thing altogether."

"I feel that too," agreed Patricia, "but I didn't know how the church might look at it, and people are so censorious."

"It is the church's business to be righteous, but surely not self-righteous. 'If there is one without sin among you let him be the first to throw a stone.' There would be no memorials if we asked perfection of a hero before commemorating his great deeds."

"No, I hadn't thought of that."

"As for the censorious . . . suppose for a moment that I refused to have this window at St. Michael's on the ground that young Willingdon, in a moment of temptation and in the heat of war, transgressed a law of the church. That would be merely food for the censorious, and in my view it would do incalculable harm. There are men all over this parish who served with Terry Willingdon and knew and loved him for the brave fellow he was. Every one of those men will feel he has a share in the Window, as indeed he has, or in the idea which it enshrines . . . valor . . . love of country. The comradeship of war is something more than a phrase, I think. Men who have suffered much together are united in an uncommon bond; and Terry Willingdon's deeds will be remembered in the Window . . . exaggerated possibly, but certainly told to the children growing up, because their fathers fought with him. We can't deny them that inspiration because a few people may be censorious."

"Oh, no, you could never refuse the Window. That's why I wondered whether I ought to take Michael away."

"We should be cowards and hypocrites to let you make such a sacrifice, my dear," said Austin. "And I don't think you need worry about the change in the child . . . the likeness to a man who died nearly nine years ago. Some of these people may imagine they see it, but how can they be sure? I have noticed it, because I am the one person among Michael's friends who goes regularly to the Manor. Though I never knew Terry Willingdon, I have seen his photograph regularly once or twice a week for years."

"I wish you had known him," cried Pat, with sudden tears in her eyes. "It might have made all the difference. Oh, Austin, he never had a chance . . . that woman holding him . . . sapping his will from the time he was a child. What chance had he to be a man? Terry was afraid of his father, and I sometimes think she played them off against each other because she was determined to have the undivided adoration of both. People call her beautiful, but to me she's something almost vile. She's malign. I . . . can't talk about her. It makes me too bitter."

"Don't blame her too much, Pat," said Austin gently. "Men are strange creatures where a lovely woman is concerned. I think perhaps she has been so much admired and spoiled by them all her life that she has come to believe it her natural right. Even now the poor old Colonel can deny her nothing; and that is one way in which the Window has seemed rather pitiful to me, for I feel convinced

he can't afford it. But what business is that of mine? . . . and, after all, if it gives them comfort in their sorrow. . . ."

"Sorrow?" cried Pat. "Oh, poor Terry, why wasn't I here during the war? for I might have helped him a bit. He was fond of me, I know, and he trusted me enough to write and tell me what had happened and to ask my help. He'd never have trusted *her* so much."

A faint warmth crept round Austin Winter's ears. It would have given him a very human pleasure to be able to kick the man who could make such a demand of the girl.

"Nor Doris, either," continued Pat. "How could he . . . that little exquisite in her fine clothes only just from school? The other girl wasn't much older, a pretty, frivolous V.A.D., wanting a good time. I hope he loved her, for she certainly adored him. Who didn't? He had that sort of charm. . . . A lot of helpless children. . . ."

Austin nodded, moved by the passion in her voice. How old had she been herself? . . . not twenty-two. Great age of wisdom! It was easy, he thought, to weave fine words about a hero, but where were the words fine enough for what she had done . . . taking Terry Willingdon's son, guarding his broken honor at the expense of her own? For he might preach his sermons and frown on scandal, but how could he stop the secret, wagging tongues?

"Don't grieve for him too much, Pat," he said,

"for after all he had his chance at last. It was a perfect end."

"Oh, I know." Patricia shook off her depression resolutely. "I don't grieve for him, really, but the Window has brought it all back. I get so furious thinking how much harm some perfectly moral people do by their blind selfishness and vanity. There I go again, you see. I'm so grateful to you for coming over, Austin, and I'm glad you know, though I should never have told you if you hadn't guessed. You have such a steady mind. I wish I had."

"You have something better than that," said the rector with his gentle smile. "You have a steadfast heart."

"Oh, dear, we seem to be throwing bouquets at each other. What shall I say next?"

Patricia was herself again, and Austin answered:

"Well, perhaps I'd better give you a month or two to think it up. Now I must go and talk to that fellow Royle. I can't have him stealing my godson's affections away from me."

"Not much danger of that," Pat assured him, as she went with him to the door.

"Better come along and lend me a hand," invited Austin.

"I think I won't, if you don't mind. He's seen rather a lot of me to-day and I shall be getting monotonous. Tell him I'll be glad to let Michael go with him to-morrow, will you? He is sure to guess I have been consulting you about his moral

character and he'll be so delighted he will probably do something outrageous to pay me out."

The rector, going off in search of Christopher Royle, smiled to himself.

"I'm glad she is taking an interest in a human man again," he thought. "Poor Pat."

He stayed chatting with Christopher for half an hour and then the two walked back to Dorne together, Michael and Blinkers accompanying them to the gate.

"He's a nice imp, that," said Christopher, "and certainly one of the lads. I've very nearly had to haul him out of the stream several times this afternoon but he was quite cheerful about it. The water isn't deep and he says he can swim, but as I pointed out that would hardly appease Miss Eden's wrath at my carelessness if I sent him in looking like a drowned rat."

"She refuses to fuss about him, fortunately," said the rector.

"Fellow feeling, I suppose. Old Towner has been telling me that she used to be up every tree in the place herself a few years ago." Christopher noticed the rector's quick look at this disclosure and went on carelessly: "Towner was really talking of the youthful exploits of your local hero."

"Oh, yes, they were a bright pair, he and Pat, I believe, but the War finished all that. She went off with her father to Ireland in '15 and never saw the boy again."

Austin's tone was just as casual as the other man's, but he was choosing his words with care.

"Still I daresay their games together have affected her attitude to Michael," he added. "She is young enough to remember how her own elders used to fuss."

"Michael is in luck then," said Christopher. "At his age I often wished my elders had once been young and really bad, though it was inconceivable that they ever had." He grinned. "I had a conviction and I have it still in spite of years of discretion that I was that tiresome product, a thoroughly misunderstood child. Dear me, I should have told Mrs. Winter that. I'm sure she'd have loved such a revelation."

"After all, these things react for the benefit of the next generation. My wife would probably tell you that it has made you human."

"If she did, I should be bound, for the sake of logic, to point out that in that case her own parents and guardians must have been perfect fiends," said Christopher. He laughed. "We're queer cattle, but I suppose a world full of people who understood each other would be just as ridiculous."

"My dear chap, it would be the millennium, and that would be too much."

Christopher looked his delight.

"Millenniums and how to avoid 'em . . . a nice topic for your next sermon. And I always thought it was part of a parson's painful job to chivvy up the millennium, so to speak."

"Of course it is," agreed Austin imperturbably, "because aspiration is good for the soul. Trite, of course, just as it is trite to say that a world without suffering would be stagnation. It sounds smug, I know, for a reasonably fortunate and happy man to talk about the beauty of suffering and pain, but just now and then one does catch a glimpse of it and know that there must be some meaning and unity in it all."

"Growth gives a meaning to it, to my mind," said Christopher," even if there's nothing more and it is a case of 'Dust into dust and under dust to lie.' I don't mean spiritual growth; that's your department. I am no philosopher and I'm afraid my aspirations are simple. I want to get to my place and make it grow . . . like Miss Eden, making glad the waste places with her roses."

"Yes, that's worth doing too, though Miss Eden is growing something more important than roses."

"And we both envy her," said Christopher. "I'll tell you what, I'll toss you for your godson."

"You scoundrel, I knew you were after him," said Austin. "Be off with you and plant your wretched weeds. And look here, no buying him the town to-morrow, you know. I can't allow bribery and corruption in my parish."

"I'm not afraid of you," retorted Christopher laughing, "but terror of Miss Eden might restrain any impulse towards unbridled extravagance. You should have heard the row I got into this afternoon over one simple fish."

"She is afraid she is taking your money under false pretenses."

"I know. Women are never any good at economics. Heaven, for a few shillings a day! Why, it's cheap at the price, and that reminds me, this is your department again. You ought to teach her better."

"Don't you think," said Austin with a twinkle, "that it might be a little previous?"

"Oh, well," said Christopher, "perhaps you are right."

CHAPTER IX

i

DRIVING in through the gates of Woden, to call for Michael and Blinkers, Christopher Royle approached the house for the first time. There was a loveliness about this early hour of the morning, a soft glow, a freshness, as of a very young world straight from its tub, and the old shabby house with its doors and windows wide seemed friendly and intimate. A glimpse of pale chintzes, of books and pictures and flowers, and a breakfast table, set in a round window, faintly stirred his envy, for this was England, and it rushed in upon him anew that he had come home. Nothing quite like it anywhere, he thought, though he couldn't for the life of him have put a name to the difference. It was not the material things, for he had to rough it very little during his years abroad. It was more perhaps a sort of essence distilled through centuries of sunny leisure. There is no vulgar hurry about an English country morning.

His few hours at Windyhill had not given him this feeling of home, but Adelaïde would account for that.

"Nothing English about Adelaide," he said to himself, with a grin because such a remark would

have shocked her to the soul. Adelaide was the British matron, another story altogether, a good woman in all those subtle ways that can make the adjective unlovely.

As he drew up before the house, Michael ran out and, after a breathless greeting and a glance of awed admiration at the car so new and shining, was off to stir up the more leisurely Blinkers. When Patricia appeared, looking more than ever like a big, shy boy, Christopher thought: "Oh, dear, why can't I take her too? What a silly world!"

"He's been up since dawn," she said in humorous despair.

"It's wonderfully good of you to trust me with the little chap," said Christopher warmly.

"I'm not so sure you'll think so at the end of the day. I warn you it will be rather like driving with a stick of dynamite; but it is a great treat for him, and thanks awfully."

"Isn't she a topping car? I'll bet she can go," cried Michael, arriving with the dog, and the two of them tumbling over each other to get in. "I say, Pat, isn't it a pity you can't come too?"

"Just what I thought, old man," said Christopher, "only I didn't dare to say it. I suppose you wouldn't?"

"Of course not; and now you have both been perfectly polite, you may go."

She closed the door of the car and stood waving to them as they started off.

"You'll come one of these days," said Christo-

pher to himself with determination; and then aloud: "Now then . . . London!"

"Oo! hooray," cried Michael with delight. "You know I was born in London and bred in Gloucestershire, like the man in the poem."

"Hullo . . . so you like poetry, do you?"

"No, I don't really," admitted Michael. "I think it's awful rot, don't you?"

"Well, once upon a time I thought so, but I've rather changed my mind about that," said Christopher solemnly.

"Of course," conceded Michael, "I do like this one and I'll show it to you, if you like. Pat has it in a book. It ends up:

'I was bred in Gloucestershire
One of the Englishmen.' "

"Sounds all right. So you were born in London? . . . a cockney, are you?"

"Am I? . . . Is it a good sort of thing to be or not?"

"Oh, excellent!"

"Are you one?" inquired Michael, thinking it over, one arm around Blinkers' neck and bright eyes turned to the man beside him.

"Afraid not, old chap. I was born in Somerset . . . at least, I believe so."

"Aren't you quite sure?" Michael looked surprised.

"I was a bit young at the time," apologized Chris-

topher, "and as it is over thirty years ago, my memory is not too clear about it."

Michael grinned.

"Joke," he said, "and of course I don't remember either. It was lucky for me Pat was there, wasn't it? My father was a soldier who was killed in France. I don't tell people generally unless they ask, because it's rather swank, Pat says, but as you're a friend of mine, I thought I'd like you to know."

"Thanks, old man. Very decent of you."

"And then," proceeded Michael, "the influenza came and my mother died too; so if Pat hadn't been about, goodness knows where I'd be."

"That was a bit of luck."

"Yes, because she's a soldier's daughter; so of course we joined forces. Pat's father only died in the War. I think that's every bit as good as being killed, myself, only Pat says it's not so satisfactory for the dier."

"There's something in that, you know," said Christopher. "If you've got to die for your country you might as well make a bit of a splash about it, don't you think?"

"Y . . . yes, but it might hurt a lot more. My father was killed in a second, so it didn't hurt. Good, wasn't it? Pat and I often talk it over because it is awfully interesting and she knows all the things he did . . . oh, well, you know," finished Michael awkwardly, "brave sort of things, only I mustn't say that."

"Still, it's nice to know," agreed Christopher un-

derstandingly. "Do you mean to be a soldier too?"

"Well, you see," said Michael, "it costs such an awful lot . . . unless," he added hopefully, "there's another war. When there isn't a war, it costs pounds and pounds. We've gone into that."

"Still, I shouldn't give up hope, old chap. Something may turn up," advised Christopher, with a sudden warmth about his heart.

"Oh, rather! Pat may grow a new rose and make a lot of money. She's pretty clever at it."

"I thought she was clever, myself," said Christopher and was rewarded with a beaming smile.

As the green miles slipped by, Christopher Royle, not without some amusement at his own expense, began to spend in fancy Terry Willingdon's diamonds on the education of his son; and in the process his mind went back to Winchester and Magdalen, those kindly and inspiriting havens from the rather chilly atmosphere of his home. Pleasant somehow to think of this youngster in a few years darting through the well-remembered cloisters and dodging proctors in the High.

"If you change your mind about being a soldier, you might go up to Oxford," he said. "There she is, look . . . straight ahead, 'City of the dreaming spires' . . . that's what some fellow called her."

"Can you learn to make motors there?" inquired Michael, all eagerness. "You can't at Cambridge, Uncle Austin says, and I've always thought that would be a jolly good sort of job."

"Well, I rather doubt it, old son. Backward

places, Oxford and Cambridge. I'll tell you what, we'll have a game as we go along. We'll suppose I'm your rich uncle from the Colonies, and we are discussing your education."

"Oo yes, come on quick," cried Michael with glee. "Which colonies will you be my uncle from?"

Christopher considered the matter.

"Better make it Africa, don't you think?" he said. "Handy place, full of diamonds. We'll say I had a couple of diamond mines lying idle and suddenly I thought: 'good lord, there's that fellow Michael. Better sell 'em and go home and spend the money on his education.' "

"And now you've come," prompted Michael.

"And now I've come, looking no end of a nob . . . check waistcoat, diamond studs and I don't know what. But I've taken the diamond studs off to-day because, as you truly remarked before we started, 'Lot of thieves in London, Uncle Christopher, and you never know.' "

Michael shouted with laughter, and Blinkers looked round upon the pair of children mildly and with a benevolent air.

"Then what happened?"

"Then I said, 'Well, young man, I suppose you'll be wanting to go up to Oxford one of these days and become a K.C. or Lord Chief Justice or Chancellor of the Exchequer, hey?' Now it's your turn."

"Of course, it would be rather a lark," said Michael playing his part. "But I think I'd rather make motors, Uncle Christopher, if you don't mind."

"Motors, my boy? Certainly, certainly, any little thing like that," agreed the rich uncle beneficently. "Still, no harm in a few years at Oxford first, you know, just for the look of the thing. Pity we're in a hurry this morning or we could drop in and see my old rooms at Magdalen and tell 'em to keep them for you about ten years from now."

"I say, what a joke! Do you think they'd do it?"

"Do it?" The rich uncle looked hurt. "Why, they'd have to do it. We're not going to stand any nonsense from Oxford. Still, we won't stop this morning, I think. After all, there's plenty of time and you've got to go to a public school first. Where shall it be now . . . Eton, Harrow, Rugby, or what? Take your choice, you know. Expense is no object."

"I know one fellow who has his name down at Haileybury," said Michael eagerly, "and another who says he's going to Marlborough."

"Not so bad, either. I suppose you don't happen to know a chap who wants to go to Winchester?"

"Is that a pretty decent school?"

"Best in England," said Uncle Christopher firmly.

"I'll bet you went there," cried Michael eagerly. "Oh, do tell me about it. Quick."

They talked Winchester and the villainies of Uncle Christopher's youth all the way to London.

Beside Kensington Gardens they were held up by the traffic for a few moments, and Michael was

entranced by a glimpse of the Round Pond in the distance dotted with white sails.

"I've got it," said Christopher. "We'll have a boat. It seems to me it's high time we had some shipping on the Severn."

"A real boat that you can sail?"

"I should jolly well say so. With a gun in the bows if possible, because, you never know," said Christopher, confidentially, "there may be pirates in Gloucestershire."

ii

They drove first to his bank and having retrieved the parcel of diamonds from the strong room, Christopher telephoned to make an appointment with old Ponder, then turned the car back to the West End.

"Lunch," he said. "The largest restaurant we can find, I think. What do you say?"

"Where they'll take a dog," supplemented Michael.

"Personally," remarked Christopher gravely, "I never patronize a restaurant where they don't take dogs. I think such places should not be encouraged."

As he watched the youngster enjoying the meal as only a hungry boy can do, he fingered the packet of diamonds and hoped their value might be great, not only for Michael's sake, but a little also for the sake of the man who had found and hoarded them, perhaps for some such purpose as his own. Unless

of course, he hadn't known that he was the father of a son.

"When is your birthday, old chap?" he asked the boy.

"It's on the 12th of November," said Michael, "I'm jolly near nine."

"By Jove, you are!" Christopher was thinking: "And Terry Willingdon was supposed to have been killed the day before! Seems to suggest he didn't know, poor chap, unless Miss Eden could tell the real story of what became of him. And yet, if so, why did he carry only that one letter of hers about the world?"

This seemed to be a serious flaw in the argument that Patricia knew the truth, but Christopher still clung to it hopefully, because such a knowledge on her part would make the passing on of the diamonds to the youngster simple. He had begun his nonsense about the rich uncle with this end in view, for Michael would probably repeat it to the girl, and that might give him an opportunity to tell her Jim Robertson's story.

He took the boy and the dog up the narrow stairs to the offices of Ponder and James, with a grin for the astonishment that his appearance in such company would certainly create. A dog, he suspected, had never passed those doors. As for the boy, Mr. Ponder would put two and two together and make the answer five.

If the lawyer made any such miscalculation, however, he kept it to himself. He was encased in tact

this afternoon, and promised to have the diamonds valued and the information obtained from the War Office without delay.

"I had a call yesterday from young Mr. Felix Woollf," said Mr. Ponder, accompanying his client to the outer office where the boy and the dog were waiting. "He came to hand in certain accounts and monies belonging to the estate; and, by the by, he feels, I understand, that you have treated him generously, Mr. Royle . . . most generously."

"Not a bit," said Christopher, rather abashed. "He's a nice chap and I hope you'll keep in touch with him and let me know if he doesn't succeed in landing another job."

"Certainly, certainly, I shall make a point of it," said Mr. Ponder. "Dear me . . . a dog, and a fine dog too if I'm not much mistaken. Yours, young man?"

"Rather," said Michael with enthusiasm. "He's a very good brand."

"This is my friend, Michael Eden, Mr. Ponder," Christopher introduced them. "Now then, Michael, when you make a fortune, you've only to ask Mr. Ponder and he'll look after it for you."

"Will you really? Thanks awfully," said Michael, and clattered down the stairs after Christopher, delighted with his new acquaintance.

Even Christopher was amazed.

"I'm a suspicious devil," he thought. "The old boy is really quite human."

"Now we've got a boat to buy and then we'll be

off," he said to his passenger as they drove through the Strand. "You don't happen to know any shipping firms, I suppose? Never mind, we'll go and ask Mr. Hamley."

Michael heaved a sigh, half anxiety, half anticipation. He was facing a dreadful problem, for he had promised Pat not to let Mr. Royle buy him things, and how was he to know whether the boat was intended for him? If he said politely that he didn't want it and it turned out that Mr. Royle wanted it for himself, he would look a silly ass.

Once inside Hamley's the problem became sheer agony, for the autocratic Mr. Royle insisted on seeing whole fleets of boats, and at last paused before a clipper ship in full sail, so perfect that Michael could only hold his breath.

"Wouldn't it cost an awful lot?" he asked in awed tone at last.

"Oh, come on, old chap, let's blow the expense and be extravagant for once," said Christopher. "You do like it, don't you?"

"Oh, rather! But . . . but you mustn't buy it for me," blurted Michael very red in the face. "You weren't going to, were you?"

"You think it wouldn't do?" asked Christopher, disappointed. "Then I'll have to buy it for myself, I suppose. Hang it all, we can't let some other chap get this ship. I'll tell you what, you shall be the skipper of it, because an owner can't sail his ship . . . against the King's Regulations. And as you have a river, it seems to me you are the man

for the job. I suppose she's quite seaworthy," he added seriously to the assistant, "because I never send my captains to sea in leaky ships. I'm funny like that."

"Your dad will have his little joke," said the shop man confidentially to Michael.

And the small boy, clinging to Christopher's arm, worked off his excitement in a shout of delighted laughter.

iii

A little after six o'clock Christopher Royle felt an ominous pull on his steering wheel and drew up to investigate.

"Thought so . . . puncture," he said, "and we are nearly home. No help for it, Michael. We shall have to change the wheel."

Michael, evidently considering this a perfect end to their expedition, was out of the car in a moment, with Blinkers bouncing after him. Christopher produced the jack while his eager assistant wallowed blissfully in the tool box in search of spanners.

They were within a few yards of the gates of Dorne Manor and Christopher had hardly set to work when a closed car slipped past them and drove in. He was congratulating himself that he had not been seen when he discovered his mistake. One of its passengers had alighted and was hurrying back to him. It was Mrs. Willingdon.

"Damn!" said Christopher, hating to be caught

like this when he was in a hurry, but completely overlooking any other aspect of the encounter.

"My dear Mr. Royle," cried the old lady in her attractive voice. "Darling Doris said it was you; so of course I had to come back for a moment, because it is the most wonderful thing. I dreamt only last night that you came and took me for a drive. Now, isn't that strange?"

"I should never have dared to suggest it," said Christopher to this obvious invitation.

"Oh, but why? I am sure you would be a most careful driver and I am not in the least nervous," cried Mrs. Willingdon, with the eagerness of a child. "It would be sweet of you."

"Then I should be charmed of course," lied Christopher, feeling like a fish on a hook. There was no getting out of it, evidently.

"Delightful! Shall we say to-morrow about three, for I have so much to tell you. The Bishop of the diocese has promised to dedicate my beautiful Window . . . oh dear! What a great dog. Go away, sir, go away!"

"He won't hurt you," said Michael emerging from the tool box in defense of his friend. "He's a very tame dog."

Blinkers, shaking the hair out of his eyes, sat down contentedly at his master's feet, and Mrs. Willingdon exclaimed in surprise:

"Not your little boy, Mr. Royle, surely?"

Christopher looked at her in the utmost amazement. Her own grandson! Even if she were not

aware of that, it seemed incredible that she should not know the child. Perhaps her sight was bad.

"No, this is my friend, Michael Eden," he explained. "You know Mrs. Willingdon, don't you, Michael?"

The youngster pulled off his cap with a shy smile, but Mrs. Willingdon took no notice. An extraordinary change had come over the lovely old face. She looked for a moment almost terrified and her voice held a tone of outraged virtue when she spoke at last.

"Indeed? The unfortunate child at Woden . . . ah, a pity, for we should set an example to the village, Mr. Royle. And now I must leave you . . . but I shall expect you at three to-morrow. Good-by."

She was gone and Christopher, feeling like murder, seized the spanner from the little boy's hand, exclaiming with forced cheerfulness: "Now then, old lad, we have work to do."

"Isn't she a queer old lady?" said Michael, carefully taking charge of the loosened bolts. "You know, I've never really spoken to her before, though Uncle Austin and Aunt Mary know her quite well. She must be awfully rich, mustn't she? And wasn't she scared of Blinkers?"

Christopher had a shrewd suspicion that she had been scared of more than Blinkers, but he merely said:

"Rum things, old ladies."

"Why do you suppose she thinks I am an un-

fortunate child and it's a pity we have to set an example to the village?" continued Michael, knitting his brows. "What did she *mean* exactly?"

"Don't ask me, old chap. Women don't mean anything half the time. They just talk for the sake of talking."

"Or perhaps she doesn't like war orphans," proceeded Michael. "There's an old lady in the village like that. I went into her shop one day to buy toffee and she chased me out, as fierce as anything. But then, she's a bit funny. She almost has a beard, and she said she knew all about war orphans. Pat says it was because I was one and some people don't like to be reminded about the war, especially old ladies."

"Well, there you are. Lot of fools in the world, old man, and it's no use taking any notice of them. Now, we'll just fix this spare and be off, or Miss Eden will be thinking I have stolen her family. I don't think we'll tell her about the puncture, do you? Might make her nervous when we want to go out again."

Christopher was seeking some way to prevent the youngster from mentioning the encounter with Mrs. Willingdon to the girl, but this was a weak argument and Michael laughed it to scorn.

"She wouldn't be nervous," he said. "Why, we often have punctures with Archibald. He's rather an old car and Aunt Mary says he's a little gone in the legs."

The young man gave it up. By insisting he might make Michael aware of something odd in the inci-

dent, and that was unthinkable, not only for the youngster's own sake, but because by sparing him, he realized he was most effectively sparing Patricia Eden.

These dam' villages and their damned old women, throwing stones at a defenseless child . . . and in an age that prides itself upon its toleration! The boy ought to be got away from Dorne and Patricia Eden with him. Suddenly the place seemed poisonous to Christopher Royle. As for the Window to a hero . . . he could finish that in about two shakes and he'd do it too, if Mrs. Willingdon did not hold her tongue.

He drove viciously to Woden, cutting through Dorne at fifty miles an hour, while Michael sat beside him in rapt excitement and Blinkers, his long hair blown backwards by the wind, looked like the travesty of a dog.

iv

Mary Winter had been spending the afternoon with Patricia and was just leaving the house as the travelers returned. Christopher offered to drive her home, and having got rid of his passengers and a large box, which, he said, Michael had promised to take charge of till next day, he drove her off.

The chance of a chat with this sane and kindly woman was something at the moment much to be desired and, after debating with himself for a moment, the young man turned to her and said:

"You have a very soothing effect on me, Mrs. Winter."

"My poor Michael, was he as bad as all that?" she retorted.

"Good lord, no. Michael's a splendid little chap and a great companion, but we were unfortunate enough to have a puncture close to the Manor gates and Mrs. Willingdon caught us."

Christopher used the plural pronoun deliberately, but Mrs. Winter chose not to notice it.

"So the glamor has begun to fade already?" she mocked.

"The glamor as you call it began to fade with your scornful glance when she asked me to tea, if you want to know," said Christopher with vigor.

"You see too much, Mr. Christopher Royle . . . and yet I don't know. But go on. Tell me how she caught you. This is really thrilling."

"She had been dreaming that I came and took her for a drive," said the young man, drily.

"Oh, caught indeed! And of course that dream will come true like all the rest. Poor innocent Mr. Royle! All her life Mrs. Willingdon has had such wonderful dreams. It is a strange faculty she has," mimicked Mary Winter. "She dreamt the Window . . . she dreamt her son's engagement to Miss Duffield. God knows what she hasn't dreamt. You had better fly if she is beginning on you."

"No, thanks," said Christopher and his tone was hard. "I rather think it is about time somebody woke her up."

"Now what," thought Mrs. Winter, "does he mean by that?"

It was impossible to ask him point blank, for much as she liked Christopher Royle, she had to remember that he was a stranger to them all, and where might not such a conversation lead them?

"I suppose she was surprised to see Michael in your car?" she remarked as carelessly as she could.

"She thought he was my son," said Christopher. "I was rather staggered. Is Mrs. Willingdon short-sighted?"

"Oh, very."

"It seemed odd that in a small place like this she shouldn't know the youngster at least by sight."

"That's not so very odd, after all. Michael is generally at school and Mrs. Willingdon is generally gadding, and the Willingdons and the Edens have not been friends for years. I don't know what the quarrel was about but I can guess who was to blame."

"Yes, not much difficulty about that," said Christopher with decision.

"Mr. Royle," said Mrs. Winter, deciding to throw discretion aside (for what is discretion, she thought, but a silly word to make us afraid of our own shadows?), "I hate to seem to defend a friend, because it is so impertinent, and yet I am going to risk it for once. Our Michael is no relation to Patricia Eden. He is a soldier's orphan left alone at a few weeks old and she took him because he had no friends."

"Jolly fine of her," nodded Christopher. "I gathered as much, chiefly from Michael himself."

"Oh, Michael! I know. He's too naïve about it, the darling. . . ! So lucky Pat was there! That's just what I was afraid of . . . for how must such a story look to any stranger when it is embellished by delicate hints from Mrs. Willingdon? Pat is the biggest babe where any knowledge of the world is concerned. Why ever couldn't she have told Michael she found him in a cabbage in the silly, safe old fashion, or even on a doorstep? Truth is too dangerous in the hands of a child. . . . And giving him her own name too . . . the folly of it."

"But rather generous folly, don't you think?" said Christopher. "She may have felt there was some good reason not to use his own."

Mary caught her breath.

"He's seen what I believed I saw," she said to herself. "Then surely Austin must have seen it too. I wonder."

"Oh, no doubt she had a reason and one wouldn't ask her for the world. What business is it of any of us, after all? She merely laughs at their slanders, but how can we laugh, who care for her? Mrs. Willingdon and her Window to a hero, indeed! To me it is nothing of the kind. It is merely a window to a woman's appalling vanity, but Austin won't see it like that. He thinks of the inspiration to the men who fought with Terry Willingdon and the children growing up; but what of Mrs. Willing-

don's precious inspiration to the women who didn't fight and whose only weapon is their tongues? What is the use of putting up twenty windows to dead heroes if you slander the living son of the twenty-first?"

"There may be a way to stop the slander," said Christopher, "but is it worth it? Miss Eden laughs, you say . . . and yet . . . no, we *can't* laugh. You are perfectly right, and if Mrs. Willingdon drops any hints to me she'll find her dream a nightmare. I may put a stone through her Window before she's through."

Mary Winter laughed, then sobered suddenly.

"Don't do anything rash, Christopher Royle. Perhaps I am just a gossiping fool like all the other women and have talked too much. But . . . oh, well, if you think as I believe you do, what I have been thinking lately . . . isn't it Pat's secret?"

"Of course I think it," said Christopher smiling. "Look here, why don't we play at words? The little chap's exactly like him. I wondered if you knew."

"Oh, I don't. I've only seen it lately and I don't think even Austin has seen it yet."

"And we three can keep her secret . . . for you are perfectly right. She has her weapon against Mrs. Willingdon and nobody else has any right to use it. Mrs. Winter, I wonder if I may ask a straight question. Do you think she loved that boy, because I have a strong suspicion he cared for her?"

(Suspicion?)

"What makes you think that? . . . What do you know?" she asked quickly. "Oh, of course I have thought she was fond of him, but perhaps it was just a girl's infatuation for a charming lad. If he cared for Pat, don't you think he had a queer way of showing it?"

"How can we judge? You tell me Mrs. Willingdon dreamt about his engagement to Miss Duffield. That must mean they were more or less led into it, to put it mildly. And for several years before he died, he and Miss Eden never met. Your husband mentioned that when we were yarning the other night. Love plays queer tricks with a man."

"What an understanding creature you are. How long have we known you . . . years, or a few days? And here I am talking to you about my best friend as I have never talked even to Austin. It's amazing."

"Not so very." Christopher smiled. "Your woman's intuition ought to tell you the reason of that."

"Christopher Royle," said Mrs. Winter. "As man to man, did you really come to Dorne by accident?"

"Rather," declared Christopher promptly, "and a jolly lucky accident for me."

"He's lying," she thought in a flash. "What a splendid chap!"

Throughout the evening the belief that he had been lying, that he did know more than he pretended, would not leave her. Yet how ridiculous!

He had been in Africa for years and what could he possibly know? Again and again their conversation of the afternoon revolved about her mind, until in a blinding flash, she seemed to see it all.

"Your woman's intuition ought to tell you the reason of that," he had said. Why, of course. What a fool she had been. He was in love with Pat. There couldn't be a doubt of it, and that would explain any amount of interest and understanding.

In the sudden joyful illumination of this idea, Mary Winter's suspicion fell asleep, never to wake again.

CHAPTER X

i

CHRISTOPHER ROYLE, at thirty-three, felt free to marry for the first time. Lack of means and his own diffidence had shut out the possibility in the past, for with his passion for beauty who was he to ask any woman to share a life which, in outward essentials at least, poverty must make unlovely?

His family's settled conviction that he was a fool and worse, though waking him to anger and sending him into voluntary exile at last, had left its mark upon him. He could never quite rid himself of a suspicion that perhaps these things were true.

Working, however hard, in uncongenial surroundings, is no way to success. The man for whom Christopher Royle grew coffee in Africa, was hidebound to a degree. He wanted neither idea nor vision, but merely a serf for a wage, and for five years Christopher fought for innovations and improvements without avail, bitterly scorning his own failure.

The women he met during those years did not attract him greatly. He could have had affairs enough, for such things in that circumscribed and

slightly abnormal life of temporary exile were a sort of recreation, but it was all so futile. The truth was perhaps that nowhere among them had he met a mind that marched with his own.

And here within a few days of arriving in England, he was sure that he had found one. It was not merely the reaction of coming home to undreamt of prosperity, with the new confidence it gave him in himself and in the future. Neither was it altogether the fact that chance had pitched him into the center of a story, for which he alone perhaps held the key. From the first glance this tall dark girl with her still look and lovely smile had caught his interest; and as the story was swiftly unfolded before him . . . by old Towner, by the Winters, by Patricia herself, but most of all by Michael, and what she was making of the little chap, son of a hero, but perhaps also of a renegade, he saw so many qualities that could not fail to move him, seeing the man he was.

Mrs. Willingdon had opened his eyes to his own feelings. He could willingly have murdered the old woman, even though reason told him there would be many other people who would take her view of the child at Woden. . . . Adelaide, for instance, and women of her kind. But even Adelaide would have hesitated to voice her views to a stranger.

Christopher Royle had now only one purpose . . . or possibly two; to silence Mrs. Willingdon's evil tongue, always supposing Patricia would allow it,

but certainly to take her away from all this and Michael with her.

Pat at Windyhill! He saw his old home glowing with a new beauty under her hand. She would love it, he knew, and there was a rose garden where she should have her way, in spite of old Benson whose special pride it was. Benson, greatest martinet at Windyhill, would capitulate to a mistress who knew and loved his flowers, not to young Michael, however. There would be war between them for certain, and Christopher chuckled at the thought. He'd get a little of his own back against old Benson, for the youngster should have his fun.

And yet why should he dream that Patricia Eden might learn to care for him, when all the evidence seemed to suggest that she had given her heart to another man? Mrs. Winter called it a young girl's infatuation for a boy long dead, but suppose it were rather a woman's love for a man whom she believed still living? If so, Christopher suddenly saw, he was the bearer of bad tidings, and what a handicap for a lover! Yet the need to find out how far he dared to go towards silencing Mrs. Willingdon was urgent, and going over to Woden next morning he planned, with Michael's aid, to contrive a private talk with Patricia. He would suggest a launching ceremony for the boat. Michael would be charmed with that and would tactfully absent himself while Christopher attempted to persuade the lady of the house.

He had seen her alone only once for a few min-

utes, but remembering them he smiled, for surely even then there had been more than a common bond between them, or was he dreaming . . . a mad romantic's dream? The need of her at least was real. It went with him challenging the golden morning . . . fear, rapture, hope, despair. That was love, and surely its fulfilment the completion of life.

Michael was not waiting for him by the stream as he had expected, and when half an hour passed without a sign of him, Christopher began to be perturbed. Had he given the youngster too many ice cream sundaes, he wondered? He had just decided to go up to the house and set his mind at rest, when Patricia herself appeared.

"Good morning. I hope that my two assistants are not overtired after yesterday," said Christopher.

"Oh, dear no. They had a wonderful time and they will be out in a moment. Michael is doing an errand for me, but I am on the war path. Mr. Royle, that boat . . . how could you?"

"Why, don't you like shipping on your river?" cried Christopher in dismay.

Patricia, perching on a tree stump, looked at him reproachfully.

"Yes, I've heard all about that and I know you are the owner of the boat and can't sail it because of the King's Regulations so Michael is to be the skipper. You have convinced Michael, beautifully, but you don't really expect to convince me with such

a transparent story? Really, you ought not to have spent all that money on the child."

"What a parsimonious family you are," complained Christopher. "First Michael remonstrates with me about the price and now you. But I had forgotten I was dealing with a lady miser."

"It is all very well for you to laugh but I was afraid something like this would happen and I told Michael not to let you."

"Well, the poor kid did his best. He did really. Don't be such a spartan parent."

"Oh, dear, am I?" she asked anxiously. And then: "But what nonsense! At least I know more about bringing up a boy than you possibly can."

"I'll bet you don't, because I was a boy myself once and you never were."

"I did my best, according to my parents and guardians," said Patricia drily.

"Yes," grinned Christopher. "I've heard all about that. You were a bright lad, up all the trees in the place. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I suppose I did present you with that red herring," observed Patricia smiling.

"Ha, ha, she's coming round. Be a sport, Miss Eden, and let me have the fun of pretending to be a rich uncle just for once."

"Oh, I heard all about the rich uncle too," she nodded. "Michael is now convinced Africa is a country blazing with diamonds and he had better grow up as quickly as possible and go and get some."

"You and I between us ought to be able to find a red herring for Michael," insinuated Christopher, greatly daring. "You'd hate him to go to Africa, now wouldn't you?"

He was watching her closely but she gave no sign.

"I don't know that it has done *you* so very much harm," she said, considering him.

"By Jove, don't you think so?" Christopher was delighted. "But then I never even saw a diamond mine. . . . And yet, my visit to town yesterday was partly to get some diamonds valued. Not my own; they belonged to a poor chap I met in Africa. I suppose you've never been there, have you?"

"No, I am one of the suspicious stay-at-homes Mrs. Winter talks about. I did dream once of seeing Rome and Venice and the Uffizi Gallery and Milan by moonlight, but that was when I thought money grew in a bank and you only had to ask for it politely."

"You'll see them yet," promised Christopher.

"Of course . . . when I am a cross old woman and Michael has found his diamond mine."

"Nothing of the kind. I can read the future and, besides, as Shakespeare says: I know a bank. . . ."

"Stop, stop. You know you really can't be a rich uncle to me."

"It wasn't *quite* what I had in mind," admitted Christopher.

The girl burst out laughing.

"I seem bound to give you openings this morning,"

she said, jumping up, "and it is quite time I went back to the garden."

"Oh, but look here, you haven't heard my diamond story, and I rather wanted your opinion of it." Christopher dropped his banter and went on soberly: "Africa is a queer place, Miss Eden, like all these countries, where men make sudden fortunes, sometimes a place of broken hopes."

"That's better than broken hearts," said Patricia reasonably, "but why don't you smoke instead of clinging to your pipe?"

"Thanks, I will. Hearts and hopes, well, aren't they much the same? Anyway, about six weeks ago, when I was trekking down to the coast to get my steamer home, a chap tumbled into my camp one night, half dead with fever. He called himself . . . Jim Robertson."

"I like your dramatic pause," said the girl, amused, and Christopher turned his eyes away to hide his swift relief. It was evident that the name meant nothing to her.

He continued the tale of the diamonds nevertheless, with careful reservations, to the moment when he had brought them to England, and still she gave no sign of special interest, except to say:

"That's the sort of thing that makes one hope the dead do live. I'd like to think he knew he'd met an honest man."

"Oh rot!" Christopher felt himself flushing, for after all the story must seem to her, since it had

no personal application, merely a bid for her good opinion. "I might have stuck to the diamonds if it had been a few months earlier when I was hard up," he said defensively. "So you don't believe in life after death?"

"How can we know?" she said. "Death is so strange. He is like a legendary monster that we only half believe in, and in the end he takes us unawares. Isn't it because we are such children that we try to persuade ourselves, when we lose someone, that he was just a sort of friendly butler opening a door after all? . . . And yet, if there's nothing more, life is so unfair. I had a friend who never had a chance, and he was killed in the War. There must have been thousands like him. Where is the sense of it? But if they do live somewhere, I don't really hope they can see us. How could they bear it?"

Christopher said gently:

"If you can laugh, why not the dead?"

Their eyes met in sudden warm understanding.

"Now I really must go," cried Patricia, jumping up, "or the roses will be dying on me, as Maginnis says, and then I shall certainly not laugh."

Christopher, rising with her, remembered the launching ceremony.

"By the way, that ship of ours . . . may we have a little launching party? Just Mr. and Mrs. Winter, because we must have the support of the church, of course, and you and the owner and the skipper and the chief mate."

"Who in the world is the chief mate?" asked the girl bewildered.

"Blinkers."

"You hopeless child. Oh, very well, on condition I am allowed to provide the tea."

"But that's impossible," protested Christopher. "You have to perform the launching ceremony and, hang it all, no owner can ask a lady to launch his ship and bring her own refreshments. The thing simply isn't done. It is bad enough to ask you to provide the cups and saucers."

She laughed and gave in.

"Have it your own way," she said in a rather shaky voice, "but it isn't fair. I'm so grateful to you, Mr. Royle, for being so good to Michael . . . good in a way I shall never forget. You see I've heard it all, even about the puncture."

She would have gone, but the young man's hand closed on her arm, holding her fast.

"Give me permission to silence that old woman," he said.

"No, no, you mustn't. Don't attempt it . . . because in my case, you can't."

"You know perfectly well that I can."

"Then please don't try," she begged in an agitated tone. "Promise me that you won't. I mean it . . . really."

"Of course I promise," he said, "for it is for you to say, but I am to take her for a drive this afternoon and I had to ask you. And why should you spare her? It's damnable."

"Oh, I am not sparing her," cried Patricia eagerly. "Not for a moment. I'm not even sparing the dead, who may be able to laugh. I'm only sparing Michael." She drew her hand gently away. "It's good of you," she said, "but let us forget her. Come and show me this wonderful ship. It is still packed up, though Michael has nearly died of virtue in keeping away from it."

"What?" shouted Christopher, indignantly. "You are no spartan. . . . You are a positive tartar. Let's come and get the poor chap out of his misery."

Michael's misery was not so great that he did not rush to meet them and hang upon Christopher's arm.

"Hullo, Uncle Christopher," he said, with a wicked grin at Patricia.

The tartar smiled and led them into the house.

CHAPTER XI

i

COLONEL WILLINGDON sat in the sun on the terrace at Dorne. He had turned his chair towards the west, for there were the woods before him, cool, green and restful to the eyes; and facing them he would not see the crumbling balustrades, bare urns and the waste of his poor garden.

The chess men were set out on a little table beside him, for when the present seemed to close in upon him threateningly as it had begun to do of late, he warded it off by playing one hand against the other. To-day he looked towards the woods. Solid and enduring they were, he thought. They'd see us all out. One of these afternoons when he felt up to it, he would stroll over and sit awhile under the old friendly trees. Many a time he'd meant to do it, but he had a cough and what with one thing and another. . . . And now that Duffield girl was here again, the poor plain creature, with her "dearests" and her "sweets," the fool! They'd not been able to find a husband for her, he noticed, in spite of all that fellow's money, but you couldn't blame the young men. They still had eyes in their heads,

if precious little else, it seemed. Well, well, Terry was out of the running there, thank God.

The Colonel had never been able to understand that business. If he hadn't been away among those damned Bolsheviks . . . for a man needs beauty in a woman and a bit of spirit, not a clothes prop. Yet *she* had been quite happy about it, his darling. That was curious . . . and yet perhaps not, for there never had been any love lost between pretty women. Jealous they were and quite right too, thought the Colonel.

Still, Terry married to that pale lump with her affected laugh? No, no, he couldn't see it. There was the chit at Woden, for instance . . . poor Eden's daughter. Straight as a lath, he remembered, and full of devilment but looking you in the eye. And bright eyes she had, the minx. It had been pleasant long ago to see her about the place; and that sister of Eden's, a good soul and handsome in her way. She'd married at forty . . . and made a joke of her age, instead of a mystery like most of them, but then she looked it. . . . And little Pat, what was all this talk about her? Ah, well, she'd made some chap happy for a bit, good girl, for what did it matter when all's said and done?

He would have liked to see her sometimes, but women didn't look at these things as a man does, and quite right too, he supposed, if society is to hold together. But he hoped poor Eden had been able to leave her a bit of money, for she would need it, these hard times. Besides, a woman always wants

money. She doesn't understand it. Never was a woman good at figures that he'd ever met. Take his own case . . . a bit here and a bit there; new gowns coming just in the old way, as though they hadn't a care in the world; and how could he deny her when she was so beautiful and trusted him? Money . . . she thought you just wrote a cheque and there it was. And that year when he was away, God, how she'd made it fly . . . this war charity and that hospital, parties of poor fellows down from London for a change after convalescence; and Duffield, damn him, advancing the money to her as large as life, when she had spent the really adequate sum he had left in her name. That's what he'd come home to . . . debts, debts, debts and a broken world, and Terry gone.

Terry! . . . and now this Window!

Colonel Willingdon no longer saw the kindly woods. He drew the chess board to him and began to move the pawns quickly with a shaking hand.

ii

By and by he heard the sound of wheels on the gravel of the drive.

That great hearse from Highways as usual, he supposed. But no, wasn't that young chap, What's-his-name, coming to take her out? A nice fellow and a gentleman, and how lovely she had looked with the color in her cheeks, like an excited child waiting for a treat. Good of the lad to give such pleasure to an old woman . . . but, lord bless you,

what bunkum. She wasn't old . . . she would never be old. But for her white hair, the Colonel could see no change in her since the day he had brought her to Dorne. Ah, he'd won her from the lot of 'em . . . snapped her up under their very noses. What a time!

She came to the door, waving her hand to her young gallant like a girl; and the Colonel, ill and old, but still loving her, rose to his shaking feet, as if in the presence of a queen.

"Just one little moment. I shan't be long," she called.

The Colonel sank into his chair again, as Christopher Royle came up the steps.

"Mrs. Willingdon has kindly consented to let me take her for a little run, sir," said the young man with his pleasant smile. "Couldn't we persuade you to come too? It is such a mild day . . . no wind at all."

"No, no, my dear boy." The Colonel glanced wistfully at the long blue shining motor. A young man's car, not a great hulking glass case like that thing of Duffield's with its quarterings and the rest of the flummery. He would never enter that, not he. It might be pleasant in this open car, he thought, but he was no spoil sport. She should have her treat.

"It's kind of you, my boy, but you see how it is with me," he said. "I have lost the habit of going out and we are all slaves to our incapacities. I play my game of chess, alone, if I must, or now and then

with my good friend, the rector, when he can spare me an hour; and so the time passes. But my wife will enjoy your little expedition immensely. Ah, here she is."

She came out eagerly, looking lovelier than ever, thought the Colonel. What a woman! And she didn't forget him, for all her young cavalier, but blew him a kiss, while the girl Doris tagged behind, carrying this and that and fussing, as usual.

"But surely Miss Duffield will come with us," invited the young man.

"Oh, no, I couldn't really." (What a foolish laugh she had, thought the Colonel. Nothing to laugh at, bless my soul.) "I always get neuralgia in an open car," said Doris. "It's silly of me, I know, and besides I must go over to Highways this afternoon."

Yes, the Colonel knew all about Highways. They thought he didn't know where the fruit and flowers came from. Damned patronage! Touch 'em? Not he.

As the car drove off and the girl came back up the steps, the old man bent over his chess board busily, lest she should stop and speak to him. But of course she did. . . . She would.

"I'm going out, dear," said Doris, "just for a little while. Isn't there anything I can do for you before I go?"

"No, no, run along," cried the Colonel testily. "Get out in the air. Don't mew yourself up."

There she was, almost running away from him.

She was afraid of him, the silly fool. Why couldn't she have the sense to know that he simply didn't want to be jumping up and down like a jack-in-the-box, and a man can't sit while a woman's standing? No doubt she meant well, but what a fool!

iii

Christopher Royle had suggested driving to Broadway, and that meant, Doris Duffield knew, that they could not be back for two hours or more. She did not therefore go to Highways first of all, but, turning out of the Manor gates, walked, with an occasional nervous glance behind her, in the direction of Woden.

Her purpose was vague. She had not spoken to Patricia Eden for years, and they had never been great friends. Doris had thought her a wild little thing long ago, when she herself came home for an occasional holiday from school; but such meetings had been rare. Nearly always Sir Peter Duffield's daughter spent her vacations in being conducted by a masterful schoolmistress about the capitals and art galleries of Europe.

That year at Dorne while Colonel Willingdon was away in the East seemed to her, on looking back at it, the happiest she had ever known. There had been her engagement to Terry, but that was like a dream, for he had only been on leave for a week or two, and his stiff, queer letters . . . he never could express himself, his mother said. Then Terry

had been killed and Doris was all of him Mrs. Willingdon had left, she declared, her darling Doris.

Patricia Eden had returned to Woden after the war, while Doris was in London on business for Terry's mother. Coming back she had found the old lady quite ill with shock, for something dreadful had happened to Pat.

"The sort of thing we deplore, darling, when it happens among the servant girls and villagers," Mrs. Willingdon had whispered. "I can't say more to an innocent child like you . . . a wicked girl! She shall never enter my doors again, naturally."

Doris could not have lived through the nine post-war years since then, without realizing now that she had been innocent . . . or ignorant. She had blushed scarlet and spent a dreadful night fearfully wondering about this thing Patricia had done, whether she was really wicked or just didn't know, and whatever one would do or say if one met her in the village.

No such meeting had taken place then or later, however, and Doris had hardly thought of Pat for years until last night, when Mrs. Willingdon had come hurrying in almost in tears.

"Such a dreadful thing, love," she had whispered, well out of the Colonel's hearing, "that . . . that unfortunate child from Woden, driving about in broad daylight with our nice Mr. Royle. Patricia Eden should be ashamed of herself. Such things should not be allowed."

Doris had said: "There, there, dearest, never

mind," soothingly. It was silly of her, she supposed, but she didn't know why Mrs. Willingdon should mind. The dear was just a little old-fashioned.

She herself had seen the little boy with Christopher Royle from the car window and now she wished she had looked at him more closely, for he was like a creature of romance. Doris was a great reader of sentimental stories, and Pat seemed a girl out of one of them . . . a being set apart in a sort of sad but beautiful isolation; so Doris Duffield walked to Woden.

The gates were wide open, but there was no sign of life in the still old garden, where she had sometimes played stiffly and fearfully with Terry and Pat long ago. She walked past slowly, went on to the end of the Edens' property, and then turned back. She was disappointed but not very much surprised. Things never happened as you hoped they would.

And then Patricia Eden came out to post a letter in the pillar box on her garden wall, looked up as she did so, and immediately hurried back into the drive.

"Pat, Pat, don't run away," cried Doris impulsively, and hardly knowing why.

Patricia turned back at once.

"I wasn't running away," she said, "merely trying to retreat gracefully. Sorry if it didn't come off."

"I haven't seen you for years," said Doris.

"No, but then you are not often at Highways, are you?"

"No."

Doris, not knowing what to say next, gave the little nervous laugh which the Colonel disliked so much, and looked up and down the road.

"You'd better go, Doris," said Patricia, "or somebody will see you."

"Don't be horrid," cried Doris, blushing scarlet. "I wasn't. . . . I'm not. . . ."

"It's all right. I was only joking."

"Oh, Pat, you're just the same. You haven't changed a bit and you look so young."

"Young?" Patricia raised her eyebrows and laughed.

"Then it must be from hard work," she said. "I grow vegetables and roses for market. Did you know?"

"Do you really? . . . Does it . . . can you make it pay?"

"I make enough to send Michael to school."

"Oh, you're lucky," exclaimed Doris, in a tone that was suddenly piteous, "much luckier than I."

"Why, what nonsense! That lovely frock . . . you must have everything that money can buy."

"What's the good of it? I'm plain and stupid. I know it's silly of me to mind."

"It's worse than silly, it's untrue. Who cares about looks in these days? Pretty pretty girls have gone out of fashion; and I've always thought of you as living abroad and having no end of a good time."

"I hate foreign places and foreigners too. I was always dragged about to them when I was at

school," said Doris. "Father has a villa at Monte Carlo and I go over now and then, but I feel such a fool among all his smart and clever friends. Generally I live at a Women's Club in town and now and then I come to Dorne. Mrs. Willingdon is the only person who cares two straws about me."

"Oh, bosh," said Patricia, suddenly the old slangy child Doris remembered. "You must have heaps of friends."

"Yes, other dull women at the club, who despise me because I play bridge so badly. Isn't the world beastly since the War, Pat? Though of course I am always happy at Dorne. This time I have come down, because of the Window. You've heard about that, haven't you? You and Terry were such friends."

"Yes, I've heard of the Window," said Patricia.

"What do you think of it? I wonder what Terry would have thought?"

She spoke the name shyly as though she had not known him very well; nor had she, after all.

Patricia said, with a sudden smile: "Oh, well, don't you think perhaps he'd only laugh?"

"But it is nice he is going to be remembered, isn't it?" said Doris eagerly. "But I'll be glad when it is all over, really. The Dedication, I mean. They'll drag me into it and I shall feel such a fool. I know it's silly and I ought to be proud. I am."

"You must be proud," said Patricia firmly.

"Pat, Pat," called Michael, dashing down the drive; and the girl turned back to him in haste.

"I'm coming in a minute, old man," she said. "I think Mrs. Cope is looking for you."

Michael took the hint and retreated. And Doris said, awkwardly:

"Is that your . . . the little boy? I should love to see him."

"Better not, Doris," said Pat.

Her heart was thumping, for it had been such a narrow shave, and this time it was not only for Michael that she minded.

"Oh, dear," she thought, "ought I to take him away from here, after all? At any rate I must keep him out of the village as long as Doris is at Dorne."

"I suppose I must go," said Doris, wistfully. "I'm awfully glad to have seen you again, Pat."

The two girls shook hands.

"I'm glad too," said Patricia, "and cheer up. Don't let people make you feel you are a fool. It's like their impudence. Tell them you are clever and they'll believe you. That's what I do."

Contrary to all the rules laid down by Miss Duffield's favorite authors, the lady who had set herself apart waved gayly to her departing visitor. Then she turned back to the house.

Had she really once thought Doris superior and a little exquisite? How stupid! And now she was held in thrall by Mrs. Willingdon.

"Poor Doris," said Patricia Eden.

CHAPTER XII

i

CHRISTOPHER ROYLE heard Miss Duffield's refusal to accompany them to Broadway with a regret that would have amazed her. He was not thinking of her pleasure, however; nobody did. He merely wanted company on the expedition to ward off possible disclosures by Mrs. Willingdon, for since he must not silence her once and for all, in the matter of Patricia and Michael, he wanted her to hold her tongue, at least in his presence. He was none too sure of his self-control, and he had given his word to Pat.

As they drove along, he talked as foolishly and hard as he knew how, therefore, on every subject under the sun, that could keep her thoughts from Dorne and Woden.

"Such a boy you are," she told him archly. "Chatter, chatter, chatter, just like my darling Terry. You might almost be my son, and so you must let me take a mother's privilege, dear Mr. Royle."

"Not if I know it," thought Christopher, and parried lightly.

"Son indeed? Why, my mother was old (liar

that I am) and not just a lovely young lady like you. I never heard of such a thing."

"The rascal flatters me," chuckled Mrs. Willingdon, much delighted.

"Oh, yes," thought Christopher viciously, "I'll flirt with you. I'll do anything."

"What would my John say to such compliments from a handsome young man . . . dear jealous John? But you forget my white hairs, Mr. Royle."

"Not a bit of it. They are the latest fashion from Paris. I read it in the papers only yesterday. All the pretty girls are wearing white hair."

"Not really? How sweet of you to tell me. But still, I'm very much older than you and there are some things at Dorne . . ."

"Oh, bother Dorne," interrupted Christopher boyishly. "You and I are going to a much nicer place than Dorne . . . knocks spots off it. Broadway . . . look, we're nearly there."

"Why, so we are, and I shall get my tea at the beautiful Inn. You will take me to the Inn, won't you?" begged Mrs. Willingdon eagerly.

Christopher took her, thanking his stars that for the moment he had escaped open warfare.

The Inn was full of summer visitors, smartly dressed people who delighted the old lady; and there could be no disguising the fact that in turn she delighted them, young worldlings though most of them were. They thought her so quaint, like an old picture come to life in this sixteenth century background, part of the atmosphere.

Mrs. Willingdon was known at the Inn and waiters came hovering eagerly, while she fussed about the right table, and smiled her lovely smile, charmed to be making such a stir. Christopher, very much in the background, watched her grimly. To him she was no picture come to life. She was a Circe, beautiful but menacing, because all suffering had passed her by. The world might rock with trouble and Empires fall away, he thought, but she would be smiling still, unseeing, unaware.

"And now," said Mrs. Willingdon, settled happily at last, "we can have our little chat, for I have been so worried, dear Mr. Royle, since I saw you driving with that child from . . ."

"Please, Mrs. Willingdon," interposed Christopher. "Michael Eden is a friend of mine and you are my guest."

"Yes, yes, but you should not make a friend of the child. You don't know what you are doing. People of our standing must set an example to the village."

"You lost a son in France," said Christopher Royle, "forgive me, but is it setting a good example to speak unkindly of a helpless child, whose father was a soldier too, every bit as brave a chap as your own son?"

"How can you say such a wicked, cruel thing?" said Mrs. Willingdon, indignantly. "My boy was the soul of honor."

"We are none of us the soul of honor," said Christopher. "The standard is too high. You are a sheltered woman, Mrs. Willingdon, who can know

nothing of war. We would not have it otherwise, of course. But how can you understand the abnormal conditions which that time imposed upon hundreds of thousands of youngsters fresh from school?"

"I don't know what you mean," cried the old lady. "My boy never left my side till that dreadful war took him away. I knew him through and through and he wouldn't have harmed a fly."

"I wouldn't suggest anything else for a moment," said Christopher gently. "It is natural that he should seem perfect to you, but isn't it just as natural that every other mother should feel the same about her lad and little Michael Eden about his father?"

"I know nothing of the father," said Mrs. Willingdon, righteously. "Led away, no doubt, by that wicked girl. Patricia Eden is a bad girl, Mr. Royle, and if we take her up and condone what she has done, how can we expect our poor villagers to lead decent lives?"

"Miss Eden," said Christopher, in a voice dangerously quiet, "is the most splendid woman I have ever met. I think perhaps we had better change this unfortunate conversation."

"She should not be permitted to remain at Dorne," cried Mrs. Willingdon, unheeding. "I shall speak to the Bishop. We should have done so long ago."

"If you do, you will regret it all your life."

"What do you mean?" She looked terrified. "How dare you . . . oh, how dare you? I am not

accustomed to such treatment, sir," she said with the air of an offended queen.

Christopher thought that was a pity, but he also realized that he was on dangerous ground.

"I am sorry," he said, "but it must be evident to anyone who knows the facts, as I know them, where such an appeal to the Bishop must lead. He will discover that Miss Eden, far from being a scandal to the village, has set it an example that any one should be proud to follow. What will he think of you?"

"I am ill . . . I must have air," cried Mrs. Willingdon, faintly.

Christopher opened the window near her.

"You will feel better when you have had some tea," he said, pouring it out for her, "unless, of course, you would prefer me to take you home?"

"No, no, my tea! Thank you."

He was too angry to be amused at her tone of offended dignity or the fact that she enjoyed the meal, choosing the choicest cakes with care. He himself ate nothing, and when she had finished, paid the bill and led her to the car with relief.

Mrs. Willingdon, accustomed to a world that bowed to her every wish and melted into submission at her frown, had met her match at last. He attended to her comfort with grim courtesy, touched the self-starter and drove her home, commenting upon the scenery as they went, in a cheerful monologue, and outwardly oblivious of her chilling and

offended silence. When he descended to open the Manor gates, she followed him out of the car.

"Please don't move," cried Christopher. "We'll drive in, of course."

"No, thank you," said the tragedy queen, "and I wish you a good afternoon."

Christopher shrugged, turned the car back in the direction from which they had come and drove for his life, not caring where he went, in the violence of his anger and disgust.

He had made an enemy of Mrs. Willingdon, but that did not trouble him. In this mood it was a triumph, a consummation much to be desired. The old harridan, defaming that splendid girl with her courage and her loyalty to a worthless young scoundrel. Christopher was incapable of seeing Terry Willingdon in any other light at the moment. It would be a very good thing, he thought, if she put her threat into execution and spoke to the Bishop. Then the whole story would come to light; in which case it would give him extreme pleasure to cap it with his own particular revelation.

The vicious pleasure this notion gave him restored his calm a little, and he soon saw that it would defeat its own purpose, if it gave Patricia Eden pain. Why had she hidden the identity of Michael's father? To his mind there could be only one answer. Many women, he knew, wallowed in vicarious sacrifice, but he could not think of her as one of many women. She was a being apart, utterly free from the sentimentalities of her sex. Didn't

her very attitude to young Michael show him that? She must have loved Terry Willingdon and loved him deeply, and so she was shielding his name.

Christopher's heart sank, for what chance then had he? None perhaps. At least he could not be low enough to tell her the truth . . . that the other man, hero in battle though he had been, was a coward after all, afraid to face the music at the end.

He drew up at last, discovered his bearings and drove slowly back to Dorne. As he approached the Rectory, he thought of Austin Winter with a measure of relief. It was unthinkable that Patricia should learn anything of the fracas of the afternoon, but a hint or two to the rector was perhaps advisable, and between them they might be able to decide what was best to be done to circumvent Mrs. Willingdon.

Austin was in his study putting the final touches to his sermon for Sunday when the young man was announced.

"I hope I am not disturbing you," said the visitor.

"Not at all, my dear fellow. I am delighted to see you," said the rector. He drew up a deep leather chair for his guest and, noting the other's troubled face, suggested a whisky and soda.

"Thanks, I should be very glad of it," said Christopher, gratefully. "The fact is, sir, I am in a bit of a hole and want your advice."

"Of course. What's the trouble?"

Christopher hesitated, seeking for words.

"Your wife may have told you that I was taking

Mrs. Willingdon for a drive this afternoon," he said at last. "Well, we've had our drive. I've never been so damnably rude to a woman in my life, nor got so much satisfaction out of it."

The rector brought him his whisky and patted his shoulder.

"Thank you, Royle," he said. "I appreciate your delicacy in coming straight to me, and I need not tell you that you may be quite frank about what occurred."

"She saw me driving with young Michael yesterday," explained Christopher shortly, "and chose to remonstrate with me. I tried my best to head her off but it was no good. The gist of it is that she considers Miss Eden is setting a bad example to the village and ought to be removed, and she is going to speak to the Bishop about it. I don't know what peculiar powers she attributes to the Bishop, but it's the incredible insolence of the woman that gets my back up."

"Hm," said the rector, reflectively. In eight years he had never been able to bring the gossip about Patricia Eden home to Mrs. Willingdon, though his wife had always believed her responsible for it. Austin Winter knew his world, and he knew Mrs. Willingdon, who, though she would never overstep the bounds of propriety, counted masculine admiration as necessary as air. Foolish and unpleasant as the notion was, he could see that such a woman might lose her head at the possibility that this personable young man . . . a rarity at Dorne

in these days . . . should be attracted to Patricia Eden.

"So she proposes to appeal to the Bishop, does she?"

"Yes. I told her if she did, she would regret it to the end of her life."

The rector looked hard at his visitor. A sharp-eyed as well as a perceptive young man, evidently.

"Let me see," he said. "You went over to the Manor the other day, I think, to hear all about the soldier son?"

"Yes, damn him. Sorry, Winter, I know my language is hardly . . ."

"Constitutional," finished his host with a smile. "It is all right, my boy. I fancy the Recording Angel must have a sense of values, and, who knows, perhaps a damn in a good cause may go down on the credit side."

"Not this one," thought Christopher, but it was not, for several reasons, possible to say so to the rector. "I realize that it must seem impertinent for a complete outsider, who is practically a stranger to you all, to offer an opinion," he said, "but I can't help thinking it would be just as well to let that infernal woman make her appeal to the Bishop, and have the whole thing come out, always supposing you could persuade Miss Eden; for what I can see, obviously other people must."

"You recognized the likeness immediately then? What a good chap you are."

"Oh, I say," protested Christopher. "What rot!"

"Well, I'll put it another way," said Austin. "Though you are, as you say, a comparative stranger, we should be very sorry to let you remain one. You were chucked quite by accident into the middle of an abnormal situation, but you had the rare tact to treat it as the most natural thing in the world. I know Patricia well enough to realize that a flicker of an eyelid from you would have had all her defenses up, but you gave her no chance. She is a woman of unusual balance and she has a sense of humor, but through force of circumstances she has been shut up in this small gossipy place for years, seeing practically no outsiders at all. You came at a moment of peculiar stress for her . . . this Window, and Michael's suddenly growing likeness to his father. For a stranger of her own world and her own generation to arrive out of the blue and calmly range himself on her side as a matter of course, was, to my mind, the best possible thing that could have happened to her; for one may talk of the joys of an easy conscience, Royle, but we've got to admit it must be pretty poor company, when most of our fellow creatures refuse to believe in it."

Christopher nodded, feeling slightly abashed. Fate, he thought, was bound to have her little joke at his expense. In the past he had had credit for vices he did not possess, and now it was a virtue. The irony of it was that he could not explain that he had walked into the description deliberately,

armed with a wider knowledge than the rest of them, without betraying a dead man who had trusted him and bringing greater pain and trouble to the one person he most wished to spare.

"Oh, well," he said, suddenly making up his mind, "I might as well admit, Winter, that I was completely bowled over from the first. Who could help it? She is amazing. I . . . I couldn't have believed such a girl existed. It isn't only this one thing. It's everything about her . . . her charm and beauty and her perfectly splendid attitude to that boy. God, if she'd do so much for another woman's son, what wouldn't she do for her own? I suppose I must seem a precipitate fool to you, and I know I'm a presumptuous one, for why should she think twice about me? Besides it's ten to one the dice are loaded against me already. She wouldn't have kept that poor chap's secret, it seems to me, if she hadn't cared for him tremendously. There'd be no sense in it."

"I'll admit the same thought has occurred to me," said the rector, "but Pat is reserved, and I confess I don't know. After all, it was nine years ago and they were both mere children. I shouldn't be too sure of the loaded dice."

He gave the other man a very friendly look, but Christopher was mopping his forehead nervously and did not see it.

"My impulse is to grab the pair of them and take them away from this place as fast as I can and let Mrs. Willingdon hang," he said, "but of course I

know I am a fool and she may not see it like that; and in the meantime we have got to find some way of stopping that woman's tongue."

"You must give me time to think it over. On the whole, perhaps we had better wait for her next move and hope that she won't make one. You may have frightened her into holding her tongue, for you seem to have been fairly eloquent. As for the rest, I shouldn't advise you to be more precipitate than you can help," said Austin with a twinkle in his eyes, "but the best of luck to you."

"Thanks awfully, old man," said Christopher gratefully. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate all the kindness I have received from you and Mrs. Winter from the moment I came to Dorne. I realize that you took me completely on trust, and that you are more than ordinary friends of . . . of Miss Eden's. If I am not wasting too much of your time, I should like to tell you a little about myself."

"Modest chap," thought Austin. "He's told me more than he knows already, one way and another."

"By all means, my dear fellow, if it will ease your mind," he said with a kindly smile. "Have another whisky."

"No, thanks. Hang it all," said Christopher laughing, "it's not as bad as that."

The rector laughed too. It occurred to him that if he knew anything of a man, there would be nothing very unconstitutional in the recital.

ii

Half an hour later the two men came out into the Rectory garden, in search of Mrs. Winter. Christopher had remembered the little launching party, which he and Patricia had fixed provisionally for Saturday afternoon, supposing the Winters could get away.

"So that is how you are going to spoil my godson," said Austin. "Nice goings-on. What did Pat say to the boat?"

"Oh, well, she held forth a bit," admitted Christopher, grinning. "She says I always want my own way about everything."

"And then gives it to you? A bad sign. Come along, you highway robber, and we'll see what my wife says about this party."

Mrs. Winter was picking runner beans with the assistance of the girl Eva, and she heard of the projected ceremony with amusement.

"How old are you?" she said to Christopher. "Younger than Michael, I'll swear. Well, Austin, I suppose we must indulge the lad. Can you get away?"

"Can't have a launching ceremony without the church," said Christopher.

"Machiavelli! However . . . Eva, here's a chance to make a cake and get your hand in."

"One of those ribbon cakes, m'm," said the girl, "that Master Michael's so fond of."

"Oh, lord," protested Christopher, "what people

you are! All the guests at this party seem to want to bring their own tea and I won't have it. Michael and I are going to Cheltenham in the morning to buy the party and that's flat."

"Don't be selfish," said Mary. "How like a man. Eva is having lessons from my cook because she is going to be married by and by, so this will be excellent practice for her. Yes, Eva, we'll have a ribbon cake."

"Better give in, my boy," advised Austin, "that will be excellent practice for you; and it is no good arguing with them. Now I must get back to work. See you to-morrow."

He returned to the house, and Mrs. Winter, having left the bean picking to the maid, accompanied Christopher to the gate.

"My pretty housemaid is to be a farmer's wife," she said, "and she is a great friend of Michael's, so she will love to feel she has a hand in the party. You survived the drive with Mrs. Willingdon then?"

"Yes, but I am not sure she will," said Christopher with vigor. "I have been having a chat with your husband about that and one or two other things. No doubt he will tell you."

"Not he." Mrs. Winter laughed. "The sphinx is a fool to Austin. He never says a word."

"You converse in signs?" suggested Christopher, grinning.

"Yes, there's a lot of that about just now, isn't there?" She looked at the young man reflectively,

a hint of mischief in her eyes. "Still I'm glad you came to see Austin. It is so dull for him to be surrounded by females all his days. No wonder he had the presence of mind to snap you up when he found you looking at the church."

"Luckiest day of my life," said Christopher warmly.

"Polite lad! But no, I take that back. Such politeness is a barrier to friendship, and we jumped the barriers, didn't we? . . . Here's your car . . . but good gracious! What's the matter, Tom?"

She had opened the gate and a young man, who was bending down, peering under Christopher's car, straightened himself, and touched his cap, scarlet with embarrassment.

"I just happened to be passing and I was taking a look at her," he stammered in apology.

"It's no good casting your eagle eye on Mr. Royle's car, Tom," said the rector's wife. "It is a new one, not an old crock like mine. This is Tom Pringle of the Manor Farm, Mr. Royle. He has a way with cars and when I get into difficulties with Archibald, he comes and waves his hand, and puts the matter right."

"Aw, Mrs. Winter," protested Pringle, saluting the other man, bashfully. "It's only what I've taught myself, sir, a bit of a hobby."

"You've been in the Army," said Christopher, with interest. "If you are keen on cars, look her over, by all means."

As Pringle moved eagerly to obey, Mrs. Winter

said aside to her guest, "This is my Eva's young man, and it is really amazing how often he happens to be passing the Rectory." And then aloud: "Oh, yes, Tom went out at seventeen or some such disgraceful age. He's one of our War celebrities. Captain Willingdon won his D.S.O. by hauling him out of a shell hole and carrying him in under fire. The village really owes Tom a lot for giving its local hero a chance."

"Mrs. Winter will have her joke, sir," said Pringle. "Me? Why, I was properly out of my head that time."

"Never mind, Tom," said Mary kindly. "You will be a great man the day the Window is dedicated."

Christopher was thinking fast. Since Pringle was one of Terry Willingdon's men, it might be useful to have a word with him, and his handiness with a car gave the necessary excuse. It occurred to him that he was still in the dark as to the manner of Willingdon's supposed death in France.

"Are punctures in your line, by any chance?" he asked, "because I got a beauty yesterday."

"Yes, sir, I can manage a puncture easy," said Tom, going round to examine the spare.

"You won't find it, because I left it at the Inn in case Towner could get some one to see to it, but if you can do it, I shall be very much obliged."

"I'll fix it up for you, sir. I'm going up Towner's way and I'll call and get it."

"Better hop in and let me drive you as I'm just off," offered Christopher.

As he said good-by to Mrs. Winter and got into the car, she called a parting word to Tom Pringle.

"You'll find all the necessary materials in my garage, Tom. You can leave Mr. Royle's tube as you pass and come and do it there to-morrow afternoon if you like, when you bring the produce over. It will save you a journey."

At Pringle's beaming smile of thanks, she turned back to the house to hide her own amusement. If he must hang about the Rectory, it was just as well to give him a genuine excuse, she told herself, in defense of this extra aid to romance.

She opened the door of her husband's study and found him still at work.

"Nearly finished?" she asked him.

"Yes, but it's poor stuff, Mary."

"Dear me! Did our Christopher upset you so much?"

"No. It was nearly finished before he turned up," said Austin. "But an occasional talk with an intelligent man does raise one's standards, my dear."

"Of course. I suppose you talked philosophy?" said Mary, innocently.

The rector, perfectly aware that she supposed nothing of the kind, smiled at his desk.

"You might call it that," he said.

Mrs. Winter straightened the chairs and picked up the empty whisky glass with a great air of

doing it mechanically. Austin watched her amused out of the corner of his eye.

"What a good thing you didn't marry a curious woman, isn't it?" she said.

"I did. First you asked Royle the story of his life and then asked him his age."

"And learned neither," said Mary with bland regret.

"He's thirty-three."

"Really? I suppose the story of his life is not fit for my ears?"

The rector chuckled. He was not to be drawn; and she came over and kissed the top of his head.

"It's all right. I rather like you to be a sphinx," she assured him. "It matches my complexion."

Then she departed. Outside the door she looked at the glass in her hand and laughed. She knew her Austin.

"I'll bet he gave him absolution," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

i

"YOUR hobby must be useful in a place like this, where there is no garage," Christopher remarked to Tom Pringle as they drove away.

Tom admitted that he made a bit out of it now and then.

"Not that there are any cars to speak of in Dorne now," he said sadly. "One time, before the War, there was a couple at the Manor, and one at Woden and half a dozen at Highways, and the old rector, he had a Ford that my father bought off him. . . . I used to tinker about with her a bit after I got back from the War. Couldn't settle down to work in the ordinary way, if you know what I mean, sir. That's how I got to know about cars."

Christopher nodded.

"The War made a lot of changes in Dorne, I suppose?" he said with a view to leading the conversation round to Terry Willingdon.

"It did that and no mistake. Dorne was never what you would call a gay place but there used to be a bit of coming and going. Now the gentry round these parts have got no money except Sir Peter Duffield."

"He's well off, is he?"

"Oh, he's got the cash, all right, but Dorne doesn't see much of it. To hear his agent you'd think they were next door to ruin when there's a bit of work needs doing for the tenants, but they keep a limousine at Highways, shut up or not, I notice, and a chauffeur eating his head off, so Miss Duffield can use it maybe a couple of times a year. Not that I'd get much chance of an odd job, if there was twenty cars at Highways. These chauffeurs are that high and mighty and Sir Peter isn't one to make them employ a local man.

"Major Eden now, he was different, an open-handed gentleman and always ready to do you a good turn. Then there was old Miss Eden. She married up in London, I believe. Real fierce, she was, and yet kind-hearted. She'd pitch into us lads and then hand us out a shilling all round and march off, looking as angry as you please."

"I suppose they think no end of you at the Manor as you served with Captain Willingdon?" suggested Christopher.

"Well, I wouldn't say that, sir," said Tom, grinning. "The fact is, I don't go up to the Manor, if I can help it. I've got an idea the old lady doesn't think any of us had a right to come back safe, not when her son didn't. It takes some ladies that way. When we came home she shut herself up and never spoke to one of us; though Miss Pat Eden, who'd known the Captain from childhood and thought as much of him as if he was her own brother, come round to every house to see the chaps and treated

them as though they were a set of fine heroes. The Captain wrote to her, she said, and she knew all about us, so it was no good trying to kid her. That's the difference between some ladies.

"My mother," proceeded Tom, as they drove into the Inn yard, "goes on to me proper about taking this and that up to the Manor and showing my gratitude, but as I says to her, it wasn't the old lady that pulled me out of a shell hole and it can't do the Captain any good. I'd do it quick enough if it could."

"Were you with the regiment when he was killed?" asked Christopher.

"Yes, and wished I hadn't been. Fair sickened me of war, that did," said Pringle, "the dirty luck of it. If he'd been killed in the ordinary way, it wouldn't have been so bad, for he was a devil for risks, the Captain. You'd think he was looking for a bullet with his name on it, as we used to say. But to get it accidental like. God, that was hard."

"Oh, it was an accident?"

"As near as to make no matter. A stray shell got one of the billets early in the morning, fair and square, blew it sky high and the three officers . . . well, you couldn't find them, not to recognize them, that is. But the hard part about it was that our Captain shouldn't have been there, ordinarily speaking. It wasn't his billet, but he must have gone across for a game of cards or something, and stayed on. Fact is, sir, very likely, knowing the war was done with or nearly, they made a night of it, though I wouldn't say that with Mrs. Willingdon about or

she'd be in a pretty way. She kept too tight a hand on Mr. Terry to my way of thinking. The lieutenant that shared his billet knew he'd gone over there and he didn't come back, and they found his cap with his name on it, plain enough, and they buried what they could find of the three poor chaps. Our fellows were that cut up they'd have liked to blow up the whole German Army, armistice or no armistice. They thought the world of the Captain. He was a lad, if you like."

Christopher nodded sympathetically and went off in search of the spare, feeling a sort of hot contempt for the lad in question. Yet later, thinking the whole story over, he saw that was unfair. Willingdon could never have dreamed that sheer chance would cover his tracks so completely that his men would mourn him as dead. He must have made a bolt for it, with or without assistance, trusting to the slackening of vigilance at the Armistice, and unable to face the mess he had made of his affairs at home. He had probably got to Paris or Marseilles, and then perhaps worked his passage to Africa as Jim Robertson, believing himself a technical deserter in the eyes of the world, which, since the War was over, might wonder, but would certainly not despise him.

In the light of his own knowledge of Mrs. Willingdon, Christopher could once more pity the poor chap, her son. He must have been a good fellow in many ways, for Patricia had loved him and he had been quite evidently the idol of his men. If he had

been weak, who could wonder at it, in the hands of such a mother?

The man to whom, in his last hours, he had given the diamonds, could now, in his knowledge of the people who had played a part in Terry Willingdon's story, piece it together with a fair understanding. Pat Eden, his best friend, and more than likely the girl he really loved, was far away; he was pushed into the engagement with Miss Duffield by his mother, but his heart was not in it, and he had this affair with the other girl who was to become Michael's mother. Perhaps he had loved her, or imagined so. At least he had not intended wantonly to desert her, or he would never have written to Patricia, seeking her aid for the girl and the probable child.

The sudden coming of the Armistice had found him, therefore, bound in honor to one woman, engaged to another, and very probably loving a third; and faced with the certainty that his mother would make it quite impossible for him to straighten out the tangle in any decent fashion.

Terry Willingdon had not been twenty-two; he had never been sent to school like other fellows, but tied to the apron-strings of a woman who had denied him every chance of manhood, except those years of War from which she had been powerless to hold him back.

"Hang it all," thought Christopher. "How can you blame the poor devil after all?"

ii

After dinner, feeling restless, he lit his pipe and went for a stroll, for it seemed absurd to waste the best hours of the day indoors. He turned towards Woden, not by the field path this time but by the road, wishing he had the courage to go in and demand Patricia's companionship on his walk. Why shouldn't he call at least to tell her the Winters were coming to the launching party? Only polite, when you came to think of it, and after all he was no longer merely a man to whom she had let the fishing; he was a friend. She had taken him into her house this morning and they had helped the youngster unpack his boat in a happy intimacy.

She might be worrying too about the Willingdon woman and how that affair had gone off. Christopher began to think it was a positive duty to look in for a few moments, if only to reassure her. Hadn't Winter said the best thing one could do for her was to be perfectly natural? Very well then . . . it was perfectly natural that, since he was passing her gate, he should go in.

Fortified by such specious arguments, he walked firmly up the drive, and presently under the cedar tree near the house saw a basket chair and a glimpse of a girl's frock. The sight unnerved him so much that he nearly took to his heels; then, calling himself several different kinds of a fool, went on.

Patricia had taken her sewing into the garden, but she was not doing very much. Blinkers and Michael

were off on affairs of their own, and it was soothing to lie out here with the cool wind on her face and stillness about her. Her life as a rule was tranquil enough, but this week she had been shaken out of her rut and it troubled her a little, for she had forgotten that companionship could be so sweet.

"Oh, dear," she thought, "it's wasting so much time and I can't afford it; but it is my own fault for asking Mary and Austin to make him stay. Why couldn't he have been a fisherman who really fished instead of this ridiculous creature?"

"Good evening," said the creature at this moment, and Patricia, jumping, laughed.

"I was thinking of you," she said, "and you promptly appeared like the geni of the lamp."

"You have to wish for him," Christopher pointed out.

"Then the comparison was a bad one," said Patricia amused. "It is quite evident I shall have to sharpen my wits or else count ten before I speak to you. You are really dreadful."

"Don't do that, because after all there are so few people to whom one can talk intelligently in this world," said Christopher. "It's all rubbish that armor has gone out of fashion. Nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand wear it and peer at each other through the chinks."

"Perhaps that is a very good thing, though I am inclined to think your knowledge of armor must be vague. *Do* they have chinks in the head-piece?"

"Oh, come now, don't put fetters on my poor old Pegasus like that. Let him roam."

"I had forgotten the beast's existence," apologized Patricia, "so you see how rash it was to expect me to talk intelligently. You must remember you are dealing with a rustic mind. Why don't you sit down?"

"Fright," said Christopher. "May I really? I ran in to tell you that the Winters can come along to-morrow."

"But you shouldn't have troubled to come over merely for that," declared the girl, in surprise. "How absurd."

"I didn't, to be quite truthful. I was out for a stroll and wanted somebody to talk to for half an hour, so I determined to risk it. If you had looked too bored at the sight of me, I was going to drop the message like a hot brick and fly."

She considered him with a smile.

"Have I really seemed as inhospitable as that . . . and to such an old friend too?" she said.

"That's one to you . . . though I am sorry these few days have seemed like years to you. . . . No, I'm dashed if I am, for think how well you should know me in that case."

"It must be awfully handy to have a mind that jumps about like yours," said Patricia with mock envy. "You'll be telling me in a moment that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds."

He took out his cigarette case and bent forward to offer it to her, thinking of the various rash an-

swers he might make to that and knowing that if he made them he might spoil it all. He thought her the most natural and unself-conscious woman he had ever known.

"That would be tempting the Fates too much, wouldn't it?" he said safely at last. "They might immediately deny me the one thing I want."

"Only one? What a fortunate creature you must be. I want dozens."

"Tell me what they are," said Christopher. "Come on, quick, as Michael says. What is the good of having the geni of the lamp on the premises if you don't make use of him?"

"But we agreed that you were not the geni."

"I didn't agree to anything so preposterous. Besides, it is self-evident. There I stood, trembling at your gates and you thought of me and drew me in like a magnet."

"I may have a rustic mind," said Patricia, "but at least I know it was not the geni that stood trembling at the gates. It was a much shyer animal. You can't be a geni and a peri on the same evening, really, Mr. Royle."

"Masculine geni, feminine peri," said Christopher firmly. "Girls are never sound on classical subjects. But at least I am glad to see that you recognize this is Paradise."

"Then it is certainly time some of those lazy angels came and cut the lawn." She laughed. "My first wish, you see, money for a celestial lawn-mower. Mine is broken and Maginnis thinks lawns are a

vanity that should not be encouraged. In any case the poor old man has no time to care for them, but when I have geni to visit me, I do feel conscious of the shortcomings of my garden. It was rather lovely in a small way long ago."

"It is lovely now," said Christopher in quick response to the wistfulness in her voice. "Where are your eyes? And in all the years you have known me, you have never shown me your rose garden. According to Michael, you are pretty clever at it."

"Oh, Michael only thinks that because we pretend it is a kind of El Dorado where some day we may strike gold."

"Don't disclaim the little chap's admiration like that," said Christopher. "He thinks you are a wonder."

"Nonsense, he thinks everyone's a wonder . . . you and Mary and Austin and Blinkers and Maginnis and half the fellows at school and even some of the masters who make scurrilous remarks about his thick head. Michael enjoys their sarcasm as much as they do, I believe. It's dreadful. You simply can't offend that child."

"Do you try so very hard?"

"Yes, I do," said Patricia with vigor. "I *won't* let Michael be a mother's darling."

Christopher threw back his head and laughed, because otherwise he must have kissed her.

"No one could call him that, you spartan. He's the manliest youngster. What a funny chap you are,

Miss Eden. You treat him like a scornful elder brother."

"Oh, it's all very well for you to laugh," she said, "but you don't know what I've seen of mothers' darlings."

"Perhaps I can guess a little," he said gently.

She smiled. Yes, he was good at guessing, yet somehow there was warmth in the knowledge rather than dismay, and she felt she could talk to him as she had rarely talked even to Mary and Austin Winter.

On a sudden impulse she turned to him and said:

"I wish you'd tell me something about your visit to the Manor the other afternoon. They showed you Terry's photographs, of course?"

He nodded.

"A splendid looking chap," he said.

"Oh, he would have been splendid, if they had given him a chance," she exclaimed eagerly, "but they never did."

"I've gathered that, one way and another," said the young man. "I suppose my being a stranger and coming here when this Window had brought him back to the minds of the people rather particularly, made it natural that they should talk to me a bit. Old Towner was yarning to me about him the other afternoon, and to-day young Pringle, who is mending a puncture for me, told me something more. His men seem to have thought the world of him. She couldn't rob him of his chance with them, Miss Eden."

"No," she said, grateful for his understanding, "and he thought the world of them too. He used to write to me . . . reams about what wonders they were. You see, Michael is very like him in a lot of ways and that is why I want him to have all the chances Terry didn't have. They never let Terry go to school, though he begged and begged. Michael went when he was seven. He shan't be held back by any sloppy woman."

"Don't compare yourself to Mrs. Willingdon," begged Christopher. "You couldn't be sloppy if you tried or any of the other things she is."

"Oh, yes, I could. Women are always liable to be sloppy if they don't take care," she said seriously. "I was the prize example of a sloppy fool on one occasion and it *has* been a warning to me. But oh, dear! I mustn't think of that. It makes me too furious. Life's very queer, I think, Mr. Royle. One does a perfectly simple thing and some people are shocked and others think it wonderful, but nobody ever sees it quite straight, as it really is."

"Fault of the armor again," said Christopher, "but it is curious you should say that. It's one of the things I have been up against all my life . . . that we are all such blind fools. It wasn't just nonsense when I said we could talk intelligently, you and I. We have a lot in common."

By an immense effort he kept his voice steady and his tone casual. Patricia looked at him with friendly eyes.

"Don't you think perhaps it is because we are

about the same age," she said, "and it is rather a funny age, not quite like any other? You were at Oxford and I was nearly eighteen when the War broke out, and since it was over, you have been buried in Africa and I have been buried at Dorne. Older people could get back to their normal lives after a time, but we couldn't go back to what we had left. The War took something from our generation, I think. We are neither pre-war nor post-war. We missed the fun of growing up."

"I suppose we did, though I hadn't thought of that," said Christopher.

The "perfectly simple thing," he supposed, had been taking Terry Willingdon's son, and, knowing her, he felt the description to be just. She never could have done it as a gesture. He remembered her letter to Terry lying in his pocketbook. It had been his first glimpse of her and had attracted him straight away, though he had never imagined the writer to be a girl of only twenty-one.

Christopher did not share Austin Winter's impulse to kick the lad to whose letter hers had been an answer. He saw it as an appeal from one troubled youngster to another who would understand, perhaps the only one who ever had understood him. Hard luck, he thought, that hunting his diamonds in Africa the poor chap had never known how gallantly she had fulfilled her promises.

"You lost your own father too," he said after a while. "Michael told me that."

"Yes, poor dad! He called it dying like a damned

civilian. He was so furious they wouldn't let him fight. He saw service long ago in India, and I was born there, but I don't remember anything before Woden. After his death in the October before the Armistice, I came over from Ireland to London, feeling rather lost and hoping to see Terry when he came on leave, but he never got away. And you must have been out there too, I suppose, thinking of leave and using dreadful language when you couldn't get it."

"Rather! I was with the guns and our language was so bad it was the pride of the Army. But I was like Gilbert's Parliament, who—

Throughout the War
Did nothing in particular."

Christopher laughed. "If I had gone out," he said, "nobody would have put up a window to me. What do you think about this memorial to your chum?"

"It is so ironic to deny a man everything in life and then give him a window when he is dead," said Patricia, with energy, "and yet . . . his men will like it, and, after all, it isn't the dead who matter. All the same, I do rather wish Mrs. Willingdon hadn't chosen holiday time for her celebration. Michael has been hearing about it from Maginnis and of course he's thrilled. Bands and all that sort of thing are so attractive to a child, and I have always talked to him about the War because he belongs to it in rather a special way and he should be proud of that. I never can agree with people who say we should forget the War, because wars are wrong. So

is plain murder wrong, but you wouldn't smugly forget the person who saved you from a murderer at the risk of his life on that account. The men who fought it have a right to forget it if they can, but not the rest of us who merely looked on. Of course Michael has been firing all sorts of questions at me and I've had to tell him that Mrs. Willingdon and I quarreled long ago so that we shall not be able to go and see the Dedication like everybody else. It has made me realize how glad I shall be when he is old enough to learn the truth and laugh. He thinks we can at least go and sit in the wood and listen to the band and the last post and that is funny too. I can't help seeing how such a picture would delight Mrs. Willingdon."

"Damn Mrs. Willingdon," said Christopher violently. "We'll find something much better for Michael to do that day in some other part of England . . . band and all."

Patricia smiled at him.

"What nonsense! We shall sit in the wood. Why not?" she said, "and you must go to the Dedication. Mrs. Willingdon would never forgive you."

"I can do without Mrs. Willingdon's forgiveness."

"Oh, Mr. Royle, you didn't quarrel with her after all?"

"Quarrel? Certainly not," lied Christopher, "but she is a bare acquaintance and old Michael is my friend. You'll not sit in any beastly wood if I have to come and carry you out of it by force."

"You are a partisan," said the girl gently. "You mustn't make our quarrels yours."

"They must be mine unless I am a damned hypocrite," he said. "Haven't I some responsibility to Michael too? Though we may never have met out there, his father and I were none the less comrades in arms, and you are right when you say it isn't the dead that matter. It is the people they leave behind. I don't want this to be just a passing friendship . . . Michael's and mine, Miss Eden. I hadn't meant to ask you so soon, because in spite of all our fooling I am just a stranger to you, but I wish you'd promise that, whatever happens, you'll let me see him through my old school when the time comes. It would be such a pleasure to me."

"Oh, I couldn't," cried the girl, her eyes suddenly full of tears. "You are just an impulsive boy, and Michael has no claim on you whatever. You'll marry some day and perhaps have children of your own. You must think of them."

"I am thinking of them," said Christopher steadily. "Nice thing if I said to my son some day: 'I knew a little chap once who might have had everything that you have but for the fortune of war, but of course I couldn't do anything about it, because it would have done you out of a bit of pocket money.' Splendid sort of parent I'd be."

"You know that is nonsense. If you carried such an argument to its logical conclusion, you would have to educate half the war-orphans in England."

"But nobody ever does carry anything to its

logical conclusion. Life's too short for that," argued Christopher. "As for Michael's having no claim on me, of course he has. He is a National Debt and you've taken it on because somebody had to, and you're paying it single-handed. Don't grudge me the chance of paying my little share, which I can well afford. Let me have the satisfaction of doing one worth while thing in my useless life."

"I don't believe it is useless for a moment, and I couldn't let you. You are much too good."

"Good?" said Christopher reproachfully, and rose to his feet, "and this is the girl who dislikes such cant from other people when she does a perfectly simple thing, and wonders at a world that never sees quite straight."

She looked up quickly and he saw his shot had told.

"Yes, I do owe you that," she said, in a moved voice, at last. "I believe that what you suggest is every bit as simple to you as anything I've done for Michael was to me. In some marvelous way you have seen that straight from the first; and you don't know what a comfort it has been to be able to talk about it all quite frankly and know you'd understand, and wouldn't think me either a sentimental fool or a noble martyr. I took on the debt just as you said, because somebody had to, and it was unthinkable that Terry's son should be brought up among strangers or on the rates. There was nothing in the least self-sacrificing or beautiful about it. I simply didn't know what else to do. Though I'm not such a blind fool that I don't realize it was the

best thing I ever did for myself. We are the greatest pals, Michael and I, and it has been splendid fun."

"Of course it has, and you will be generous and promise to let me have my share of the fun?" he said. "I am well off for the first time in my life and without a responsibility. Hang it all, I think you are almost bound in charity to give me one. I've six months' unearned income eating its head off in the bank at this very moment. I'll tell you what, we'll invest it for the little chap as a start."

"Oh, dear, you mustn't," cried Patricia in dismay. "Don't be so headstrong. Michael's all right, for some years yet, and who knows? We may find gold." She smiled. "If we don't, I promise to appeal to the geni."

She did not thank him and to Christopher, going home, there was sweetness in that, as at the recognition of more than a common bond between them. They were partners in Michael's future at least, and what better step could there be to the fuller partnership he hoped for? He had not dared to give her a hint of that lest he should spoil it all; and now he saw that more than ever he must go carefully, or she would think it had been just a ruse to buy her interest.

It had not. If in the end Fate should deny him, he would still have, through Michael, the happiness of serving her. The diamonds, whatever they were worth, must be Michael's, of course, but the school fees should be his own affair, Christopher decided.

He strolled back to the Inn through the summer twilight, dreaming splendid dreams, yet strong in his determination to go gently. It seemed so easy when she was not near.

iii

"Now then, Michael," said Patricia, at the play-room door, "bedtime."

"Oh, dear, I'm so busy, Pat, and I'm sure your watch is fast."

"Not a second. Quick march."

"I wish you weren't so awfully punctual," complained eternal youth, leaving his boat reluctantly. "I say, Pat, why don't they put up a window to my father?"

Patricia considered her answer seriously.

"Rather swank, don't you think?" she said at last, and then smiled, thinking of Christopher Royle. "Your father has something better than a window, old man."

"Has he? What?" asked Michael eagerly.

"A rascal of a son who hates to go to bed."

"Oh, Pat . . . you are so terribly keen on bed. And why am I better than a window?"

"Well, think it out. If I offered you a choice of another boy to scrap with or a fine window for the play-room, would you choose the window?"

"Not much," said Michael. "Didn't Captain Terry have a son?"

"Captain Terry wasn't married, Michael," said Patricia.

"Oh!" Michael thought it over. "Well, why didn't you marry him?" he inquired in a praiseworthy effort to prolong the conversation.

"He didn't ask me, for one thing, but I shouldn't go and repeat all this to your friend, Mr. Royle, if I were you."

"He wouldn't tell," said Michael confidently.

"Of course he wouldn't, donkey. But you are rather too fond of quoting me. Pat says this and Pat says the other. Boys shouldn't always be quoting a woman."

"Oh, well, I think lots of the things you say are rather interesting," said Michael handsomely.

Patricia laughed.

"Very clever, darling, but flattery doesn't work this evening. Off you go now, and don't dream about windows. You'd better dream of that rich uncle who is going to send you to Winchester."

"Wouldn't it be a lark if we had one?" said Michael, sighing. "Have I any real uncles?"

"You have your Uncle Austin and your Uncle Christopher, which is far more than you deserve."

"Ha, ha! Pat fell in," shouted Michael in triumph. "You said I wasn't to call him that."

"Well, I've changed my mind." Patricia gave him a boyish hug. "Good night, rascal," she said.

"Good night, old thing," said Michael Eden.

CHAPTER XIV

i

DORIS DUFFIELD, after her meeting with Patricia, turned towards Highways with a pleasant feeling of excitement. Pat had been as kind and friendly as though there had been no break in their acquaintance, and Doris was filled with wonder at her own courage in having called her back, and so broken the ice between them. She went over and over their brief conversation, finding solace in the fact that the other girl had admired her frock and had always thought of her as having a splendid time, even though such a supposition was miles away from the reality.

Doris was not usually conscious of active unhappiness, in spite of her little outburst of self-pity to Patricia Eden, but she was a lonely creature, eager to respond to affection and unable to inspire it.

Her father, she knew, cared nothing for her, though, if he had lifted a finger, she would have gone with him to the ends of the world. Instead, it was quite possible that she would never see him again, for she had paid her last visit to Monte Carlo. She had found a situation there to which she was too clumsy and inexperienced to rise, but she never mentioned that, hiding it like a guilty secret. When

she was at Dorne, she looked after the people in the village nominally in his name but far more often than not out of her own allowance, hoping against hope that they would believe him generous. When repairs were needed that were beyond her means, she wrote to him, awkward, appealing letters, which he answered curtly, reviling the shiftlessness of the tenants, but enclosing the necessary check. He thought her a busybody and a prig, and she cried over his letters, keeping every one of them.

She had no love for Highways. The great modern house, shrouded in ghostly linen, gave her cold welcome and she was vaguely afraid of it. To-day she avoided its blind, unfriendly eyes, and crossed the gardens with the sudden, despairing sense of the waste of all this. Flowers everywhere and no one to enjoy their beauty; grapes and peaches ripening in the glass-houses, and but for the basket sent to the Manor every other day, the gardeners selling them for their own profit, she was sure. And over at Woden Patricia Eden was growing her roses and vegetables to send the little boy to school.

Pat had been kind, and Doris knew humbly that there was no reason why she should have been, after nine years of neglect. But Mrs. Willingdon was so straight-laced and it was all so difficult; and, she supposed, in her heart Pat must think her an awful little cad. Besides, for Terry's sake, she ought to have stood up for Pat.

On an impulse Doris called one of the gardeners

and ordered him, in a hushed tone, as though somebody might hear, to send a basket of the best grapes and peaches to Woden the first thing in the morning, together with a note to Miss Eden which she would presently give him.

The note was more difficult to write than she had imagined but she compassed it at last, sitting at a table in the hall, facing the staircase, because with her back to it she always imagined people creeping down. Every movement of her chair sent its echo through the deadly quiet of the house, and at last, with a sort of terror, she opened the hall doors so that if she should be able to bear it no longer she could rush outside.

"Dear Pat," she wrote,

"Please don't be cross about this. I'm over at Highways, where I come every now and then to get the letters, and it does seem such a shame for all the fruit to be wasted.

"I know I'm a beast not to have come to see you all these years, but it's so awkward at Dorne, because Mrs. Willingdon likes me to be with her all the time.

"I don't care what you did Pat, really, and I'm awfully glad you have your little boy. Won't you be friends and we might meet in town sometimes. I'm going back to the Princess Club after the Dedication, or you could write me here and fix up a day. Couldn't we take little Michael to the zoo or something?

"I'm silly at saying what I feel, Pat, but I was awfully glad to see you to-day. Please forgive me.

"Yours affectionately,

"DORIS DUFFIELD."

She felt better when this note was safely in the gardener's hands, exalted a little, and yet guilty too, on Mrs. Willingdon's account. The darling wouldn't like it, but then she need never know, and after all one had to be modern about these things nowadays. Mrs. Willingdon was old and you couldn't expect her to change.

Doris, having abased herself, was happy, and it was with surprise and dismay that she learned on reaching the Manor that its mistress had returned from her drive mysteriously ill and was waiting for Miss Duffield in her room.

"Oh, my darling," cried the old lady tearfully. "Such a terrible experience as I've had. Hush! Close the door, my love. I dare not let the Colonel hear. That wicked girl and that extremely impertinent fellow . . . I'm quite ill. I have never been treated so in all my life."

"W——what happened?" stammered Doris, in a frightened voice.

Mrs. Willingdon was not clear about what had happened. She sobbed into her lace handkerchief, while Doris stroked her hair, not daring to question her further.

"She should be sent out of the village," sobbed Mrs. Willingdon at last. "She is a public scandal,

love. I think you should write to your father about it."

The idea struck Doris, knowing what she did of her father, with a sudden bitter humor. How he would smile at such a naïve request. As one humoring a child, she pointed out that Woden belonged to Patricia Eden and her father could hardly interfere.

"Ah, but the place should be made too hot for her, my darling, and your father must think of his poor people in the village. Such a bad example! I intend to speak to the Bishop but we must have your father's support, for he is lord of the manor. Write to him, love. Go and write to him now."

Doris said awkwardly:

"But what has she done?"

"Done? She has broken the laws of God," said Mrs. Willingdon, with dramatic relish, "and now she flaunts it in our faces. She has poisoned that young man's mind, my sweet. Oh, a wicked girl, and the dreadful things she says just as she said them long ago, but I couldn't tell you then, such an innocent as you were. My Terry's girl," sobbed Mrs. Willingdon, relapsing into tears again.

Terry's girl? Doris was not so sure. She thought of Patricia Eden, her short hair blown back by the wind, saying with that little smile of hers: "Don't you think he'd just laugh?" and for once in her muddled life she saw clearly. How could Terry ever have cared for her, beside that radiant creature whom sorrow and pain and slander had not dimmed? Terry and Pat had always laughed together while

she stood outside, but, oddly, she was not conscious now of any bitterness in the knowledge. She cried to herself: "I don't care what she has done. She is happy and splendid. I'd never have had the pluck . . . or the chance."

"Go, darling, and write your letter," begged Mrs. Willingdon, "and tell him the dear Bishop will be here for the Dedication on Wednesday and we must have his support so that something can be done about that wicked girl. Ask him to reply by return and tell him I count on him. And then you must dine with my John and keep him amused, for if he heard a whisper . . , oh, dear! You must say I have a headache, love, and only want to rest. Don't alarm the Colonel."

Doris escaped from the room with relief, not however to write to her father. That idea was too absurd. Much as she loved Mrs. Willingdon she could not face the sarcasm such a letter would call forth. Besides, there was Pat, whose friendship she had asked for, and what was it all about? People hinted and hinted, but never told you anything.

"I suppose I'm silly," said Doris to herself, "but I don't know why the poor darling should be so upset."

ii

Colonel Willingdon walked restlessly up and down the drawing room waiting for dinner. His wife was ill, they said, but why were they all so dam' mysterious? A pretty business, when he couldn't see her

and that girl could walk into her room as large as life. He'd seen her do it, the silly creature, fluttering all over the place. What you wanted in a case of illness was a sensible woman with a head on her shoulders, not a fool like that. And now he'd have to sit through dinner with her, knowing she knew all about it while he was in the dark. Thought he'd ask her, no doubt. Well, she was dam' well mistaken. He wouldn't ask.

Doris came in, fumbling at the door as usual and smiling at him nervously. No ease of manner, thought the Colonel testily, but what could you expect?

"Is your cough better to-night, dear?" said Doris.

"It's been better for days. God bless my soul," said the Colonel with irritation, "I should have thought you'd notice that."

"Silly of me," said Doris, in eager apology, "but I'm so glad. Did you have a nice game of chess?"

Nice game of chess? Anyone would think it was tiddle-de-winks or beggar-me-neighbor. The Colonel couldn't bring himself to answer the question.

"Our poor darling has a bad headache," proceeded Doris.

"I know that perfectly well. Why will the women of this household fuss over the slightest thing? My wife constantly has headaches and she dislikes a fuss."

"She's so brave, the darling, but you see she was a little worried, dear, because she thought you would

be anxious, and she asked me to tell you she only wanted to rest."

"Well, well, let her rest. Best possible thing for all of us and precious little of it we get."

The gong rang, and the Colonel, pulling himself together opened the door for his unwelcome guest. She was in green, a soft and pretty frock as simple and expensive as the Rue de la Paix could make it. It was the Colonel's favorite color and she had worn it on purpose, wistfully anxious to please him and conscious that she would fail. He despised her, she knew, but she had no suspicion that his antipathy had any other basis than her own stupidity. He was at heart a kindly man, and if she had been the daughter of any other man but Sir Peter Duffield, he would have been a perfect host. As it was they sat through dinner awkwardly, the great dish of Highways peaches between them and the Colonel gazing at it with malevolent eyes.

"You know Miss Eden, don't you?" he said suddenly, after a long silence. He hardly knew why he asked the question, except that little Pat had been oddly in his mind all the afternoon; and the old days and Terry . . . those two youngsters up to mischief in poor Eden's garden and about the woods.

Doris, startled and feeling guilty, blushed, a signal which the Colonel inevitably misunderstood. A prig, of course, poor fool. He might have guessed it.

"You must have known little Pat Eden," he persisted, with no other desire than to add to her discomfiture; and Doris said faintly:

"Yes, of course, dear. We used to play together in the holidays."

"Ah, a fine girl," said the Colonel.

"Yes, isn't she?" exclaimed Doris eagerly, then turned a deeper red. By saying that she was being disloyal to Mrs. Willingdon, yet silence would have been equally disloyal to Pat and to her own expressions of repentance for neglecting her. "I . . . I always liked Pat," she finished lamely.

"Ha! Then you've seen something of her, of course?" said the Colonel, pinning her down, because he was contemptuously certain she had done nothing of the kind.

Doris in a panic was convinced he knew of her meeting and disapproved of it. Somebody had told him and now he would tell Mrs. Willingdon, and what on earth would happen then? In a desperate effort to stop any such disclosure, she said:

"I . . . I saw her for a moment to-day, as a matter of fact."

"Hey?" said the Colonel, utterly confounded, and for the first time he forgot the Highways peaches and noticed the green frock. "What, you spoke to her, did you?"

"Oh, yes, I . . . I spoke to her. You see, we used to play together," stammered Doris. "I haven't told darling Mrs. Willingdon, because I know she wouldn't approve, but Dorne is such a little place and we were bound to meet some time, and one can't . . . I mean, I wouldn't do anything to hurt Mrs. Willingdon for the world."

"Hurt your grandmother," said the Colonel. "Gad, you women are all alike. My dear wife belongs to an older generation and looks at these matters through its eyes. And a dam' fine generation it was. But you modern young people pretend to all sorts of liberal ideas and when the moment comes to show your principles you funk it and hide behind the prejudices of your elders. Principles? You haven't any."

He flung down his napkin and, rising irritably, once more opened the door for her. Doris, utterly bewildered, went out.

For a brief moment they had been very near to understanding, but the moment had passed.

iii

What did the Colonel really think of Pat and her little boy? Doris had always imagined he was quite as disapproving as Mrs. Willingdon, but to-night he had almost seemed to defend her.

People were all so queer and you never could quite make out what they really meant. Pat hadn't been queer in that way, thought Doris, in sudden illumination. Pat was splendid, hitting straight out, yet laughing at you in the nicest way, without a hint of anything behind. Perhaps it was because Colonel and Mrs. Willingdon were old that they hid their meaning in a maze of words and tangled you up. And why was Mrs. Willingdon afraid the Colonel should hear how it was she had come back from her drive so much upset; and what was it

actually that had upset her? Doris felt caught in a net of purposes and prejudices she did not understand.

She could not rest in the house this evening, and at last she put on a light coat and went out, ostensibly to buy stamps. The sun had passed behind the woods and only a faint glow remained, the old trees and the spire of St. Michael's etched sharply against it. Before the village cross she saw, as she went by, a glass jam jar filled with cottage flowers already drooping, and she thought of the gardens at Highways with no one to enjoy their beauty. She would have liked to bring over a load of flowers for the cross, but she was much too self-conscious to do that, for Mrs. Willingdon would expect to be consulted about such a scheme and would immediately make a ceremony of it.

If Terry's name had not been there Doris felt she could have sent flowers every day and made the little shrine the loveliest in England.

Near the church she met Austin Winter and stopped him eagerly, because it was a relief to speak to someone and he was always kind.

"Oh, Mr. Winter, I have been wondering whether you will want flowers for the church on Wednesday," she said with sudden courage. "Shall I send over one of the men from Highways to find out just what you need?"

"That would be very good of you, Miss Duffield. The Window is nearly finished, so perhaps you would like to come in and look at it. We have it

covered as Mrs. Willingdon doesn't want it to be seen before the Dedication, but that naturally would not apply to you."

Doris was not so sure, but she was too nervous to make any objection, and followed the rector into the church.

Religion was to her merely a part of her upbringing, which she never questioned . . . a set formula of going more or less regularly to church and making a number of statements in a reverent voice, statements so familiar that they had become automatic and lost their meaning for her if they had ever had one. But the old church of St. Michael with its Norman arches seemed to have no bearing on these things at this hour, and there was a simple majesty about it which she had never noticed when it was lighted and full of people.

As Austin Winter pulled aside the curtain before Terry's window, and the pale light from without came softly through the mellow, ancient glass, her eyes filled with tears, for this was a lovely thing. It had no other meaning for her at the moment, no association with the boy she had so little known and might have married, no sense of loss. Beyond the world of puzzling human creatures she saw Beauty.

"This is a sad occasion for you, Miss Duffield," said the rector gently.

And Doris recalled to earth, answered with a rather wistful smile: "That's all so far away, but this is beautiful. Oh, thank you. I'll never forget it."

On Wednesday, she realized, she would have to stand here in the deep black of Mrs. Willingdon's choice, with the eyes of the congregation upon her, because she wore Terry Willingdon's ring. She would cry because that was expected of her and she would feel foolish and upset. And Patricia Eden would not be at the Dedication, and somewhere Terry would be laughing.

Doris had no conscious sense of irony, but for a moment she saw that all this was a sham. She knew that if only she had the courage to defy them all and spend Wednesday in exile with Patricia Eden, she would be nearer to the hero through whom, ten years ago, she had caught her one brief glimpse of romance.

CHAPTER XV

i

MRS. WINTER arrived at Woden early next afternoon, leaving Austin to follow later, and found Patricia arranging a dish of grapes and peaches for the tea-party.

"Mr. Royle is doing us well," said Mary. "What an extravagant lad he is."

"Oh, I am going to slip these out when he isn't looking," explained Patricia, "having been strictly forbidden to contribute. They came from Highways."

"My dear! What unexampled patronage!"

"I might have thought so, if I hadn't seen Doris yesterday, but we had quite a conversation and this is the result. She did not mean to be patronizing, I'm sure." Patricia laughed. "Doris doesn't mind what I've done, Mary darling, and she's glad I have my little boy."

"Don't laugh," stormed her friend indignantly. "The impertinence of these people makes me boil. I'd like to wring their necks."

"Wring Mrs. Willingdon's, by all means," said Patricia, "but spare poor Doris. Oh, you are quite right, I shouldn't laugh, though I can't help seeing the funny side of it. It's mean of me, for Doris has

done what must have seemed to her quite a plucky thing, though she did put it so awkwardly. She wants me to meet her in town some time and take Michael to the zoo."

"She saw Michael then?" said Mary in a startled voice.

"Oh, lord no . . . she mustn't ever. I see Austin has told you."

"Austin?" said the rector's wife. "I didn't even know he knew. But I have eyes."

"Oh, dear," said Pat, looking troubled. "You and Austin and Mr. Royle . . . if all my friends can see it, what of my enemies? I am sure I ought to take Michael away from Dorne."

"Enemies?" snapped Mrs. Winter. "You have no business with enemies. And as for taking Michael away, don't be a fool. Oh, Pat, my dear, I know it is none of my business, but in all the years I've known you we've never talked of this before. Do let me have my say. Surely you are being a quixotic, sentimental idiot, to shield these people at the expense of yourself. Why should you hide the fact that Michael is Terry Willingdon's son?"

"It isn't my secret, for one thing," said Patricia soberly, "though I don't think I should ever suffer martyrdom on that account." She smiled, then flushed a little at a painful memory. "I forgot it once," she said, "and then, if you like, I was a sentimental fool, but never again. As for shielding them, I'm not, except Doris. One must shield her. It's

only decent, for no doubt she loved him, and it would be cruel to tell her that he'd let her down."

"He didn't let you down, I suppose?" said Mrs. Winter, indignantly.

"Of course he didn't. Terry was always straight with me. He wrote and told me about his engagement. It was a funny letter, but he never could express himself . . . all about how pleased his mother was and the money Sir Peter was going to settle on them. Still, he said, the War wouldn't be over for twenty years or so, so there was no hurry about it. It wasn't until you told me, ages after, that I knew Mrs. Willingdon had dreamt the engagement. I wish I'd known it at the time."

"Why?" asked Mary bluntly.

"Because it would have saved me one pretty bad mistake. But, never mind, I'm very lucky really."

Patricia came and sat on the arm of her friend's chair and shook her gently.

"Oh, Mary, it is you who are the sentimental idiot," she protested. "I am none of the beautiful things you think me, really. I am just a vicious and agitated old mother hen with one chick. It's Michael I'm shielding. He's mine and she shan't have him."

"Good heavens! Do you imagine Mrs. Willingdon would want to take him from you if she knew?" exclaimed Mary in amazement.

"Not while she thinks he is my son," said Pat. "So you see that old libel comes in useful after all; and why should I care? I'm happy. I have Michael and such splendid friends . . . you and Austin and

now this lunatic in the garden who wants to see Michael through his public school."

"What?" Mrs. Winter sat up. "Dear me, our Christopher does work fast."

Patricia laughed helplessly.

"Fast?" she echoed. "He is really dreadful. I never know what he is going to do next."

Mrs. Winter smiled at the ceiling. She thought she had a fairly good idea, but it might be inadvisable to mention that since Patricia was so evidently unconscious of it. As the girl returned to her fruit the elder woman watched her with friendly eyes, glad that the reserve of years had been broken between them at last. She had never seen such an amazing mixture of worldly wisdom and unworldliness, she thought; and now the approach of a happiness Patricia did not even suspect, was making her glow and breaking down her defenses, one by one. Mary knew that no virtue of hers had produced this confidence. Someone had been before her and, being a stranger and a perceptive one, had taken her unawares. Not many days ago Patricia had declared sincerely that she had no place in her life for friendship, but now she included Christopher Royle among her friends as a matter of course.

Mary Winter suddenly laughed.

"Oh, Pat," she said, "you are an infant."

"We are all infants, if you ask me, with our launching parties," said Patricia. "Come and help me smuggle these out, there's a dear. There is sure to be a row about them."

There was. They met Austin as they left the house, but Christopher was so busy protesting against the outrage to his hospitality, that he forgot to greet his guests.

"This isn't a school treat where you bring your own mugs," he said indignantly. "First Mrs. Winter with a cake the size of a house and now you with a mountain of peaches. It isn't fair and I shan't play."

"They were a present," apologized Pat, "and they would certainly kill Michael and me if we ate them all. But, of course, if you don't want to save our lives. . . ."

"They're jolly good peaches. You have one, Uncle Christopher," advised Michael.

"What's that?" shouted Austin, diverting the argument into another channel. "I won't have you usurping my privileges, you scoundrel. Uncle Christopher indeed! Anyway, he is my godson and you can't go one better than that."

Christopher grinned and said something which the two women could not hear and Austin laughed and patted him on the back.

"Now he has squared the church," said Mary, who had been watching them amused.

Patricia turned round from the tea-table enquiringly.

"It sounds very immoral, but I can quite believe it," she said.

The little clipper ship, with all sails set, was ready for launching, on slips which Michael and Chris-

topher had built at the edge of the stream. They had been mysteriously busy over her that morning, and Michael, unable to contain his triumph any longer, drew attention to their handiwork. The original name had been painted out and replaced by "Pat of Gloucester."

"You have to christen her as well as launch her, Pat," said Michael.

"Then I shall charge a double fee. And if you have called her after me, Captain, I hope you have a Jolly Roger, for she will certainly have to be a pirate ship."

"Pirate, miser and Eurydice all in one week," protested Christopher. "You must be a chameleon."

"You've forgotten a few," said Pat. "Tartar, for instance."

"Oh, no, I haven't, but I'm not going to tell you what I think of you before all these people."

"This sort of thing goes on all day," protested Pat, in mock despair to the people. "In my country innocence I give him openings and he snatches up every one."

"Not every one, I haven't the pluck," said Christopher, significantly, and the others laughed.

"Yes, we have all agreed shyness is your besetting sin," retorted Patricia. "However, perhaps you can screw up your courage to tell me how to launch this galleon. What must I do?"

"You must make a speech and throw bouquets at the owner."

"Oh, dear! Won't peaches do?"

"Certainly not. You hit too straight." Christopher laughed. "It is all right, Miss Eden, we'll let you off the bouquets and the speeches. Come along, Captain, and get her ready. Now all you have to do is to break this little bottle of champagne over her and wish her a jolly voyage."

"Champagne?" echoed Patricia in a horrified voice. "My poor fish!"

"They are my fish, pardon me," corrected Christopher, "and I always feed them on champagne. I'm funny like that."

Patricia, helpless with laughter, broke the bottle forthwith and the Pat of Gloucester set sail, the captain and crew racing joyfully along the bank beside her.

"There is only one thing more," said Christopher, bringing a small box from his pocket and thrusting it gently into the girl's hands. He had searched Cheltenham from end to end that morning for a little souvenir, and having at last found something that pleased him, was now terrified lest she should refuse to take it. "Every lady who launches a ship must have a trophy," he assured her. "King's Regulations again."

Patricia, opening the little box to find a jeweled ship winking at her in many colors, cried in admiration and dismay:

"Oh, but I couldn't, Mr. Royle. This is far too lovely."

"Not a bit of it," declared Christopher eagerly. "Please, Miss Eden. I picked it up in a second hand

shop for next to nothing, and it was so obviously the very thing for a souvenir. It is only paste, you know. And now I must be after my crew. Come on, Winter. We can't let the Pat of Gloucester founder on her first voyage."

He rushed off she knew to avoid further protests, and she looked after him for a moment, then turned to Mary Winter in despair.

"What can you do with such a man?" she said, holding out the trophy for her friend's inspection.

Mary took it out of the box, smiling over the transparent tale that it was only paste. It was just as well, she thought, that Pat was such a babe.

"If it were my case I should kiss him," she said promptly, "but I'm not sure that would be an effective cure in yours." She pinned the little trinket in the front of Patricia's white frock. "Wear it for him, my dear. That will please him," she said. "Are you going to let him send Michael to school, because Austin and I have always hoped to help with that when the time came?"

"What dears you are," cried Patricia gratefully. "I never knew a child with such generous friends. But of course I haven't promised anything. I've told Mr. Royle he is much too impulsive."

She settled herself into one of the garden chairs beside Mrs. Winter, adding after a moment:

"You know I like his fooling, Mary. It makes everything so easy. But I don't think he is merely superficial."

"You surprise me," said Mary, controlling her gravity.

ii

The two women sat in a pleasant silence under the trees, watching the masculine end of the party playing with the graceful little ship like the children they were. Blinkers bounced about among them, getting in everybody's way, and his excited barks and Michael's laughter came to them mingled with the deeper voices of the men.

Christopher was in flannels to-day and, like most of his sex, looked well in them. Patricia, now she came to think of it, found there were many things she liked about this tall, thin young man, with his dark hair and clean-cut face. He was browned by tropic suns, but he had not lost his English trimness, and he looked fit and strong. She remembered his anger when he had begged her yesterday to let him silence Mrs. Willingdon; his halting story of the man dying in Africa with diamonds in his hand; and all their talk last night, aware that she had had many glimpses of a quality which all his fooling could not hide. The old days of the War came back to her, and all at once she realized that here was a man who had come through it . . . the first of her own world and generation that she had really known. Buried at Dorne, she had believed it a broken world, though she had been happy enough with Michael and work to do, but now she was not so sure. There must be many men like this, moved to a deeper pity

and understanding, because in their boyhood they had been flung into chaos.

She tried to picture Christopher's boyhood but he had told her little about himself except that he was now well off for the first time in his life. Had he any people? She did not know. Winchester . . . Magdalen . . . the War . . . exile . . . and wealth . . . that was all she knew of him and inevitably she got the picture wrong. A careless, light-hearted, happy youngster, he must have been, she thought. If Terry had lived, he too might have been such a man.

Mrs. Cope arrived presently with tea and Patricia went in search of the shipping experts, now out of sight. Michael and Austin were on the further bank, hauling in the little craft, which had weathered the Horn, Christopher solemnly announced. The Horn was a rope which he had fixed across the stream, where it narrowed just below the rustic bridge, to prevent the Pat of Gloucester sailing into deeper water.

"I hope you don't mind," he said to Patricia, "because really it is dangerous for Michael below this point. The current is quite strong and he is such a venturesome little devil. I took it on myself to read the riot act to him and to tell him if he goes beyond the barrier there will be a row. It went down because I was able to persuade him it's my river, temporarily."

"It is good of you to take such care of him," answered the girl. "He is venturesome and perhaps

that is partly my fault. I never feel it's fair for a woman to fuss too much about a boy."

"But a man may," finished Christopher, "so the fussing shall be my job, eh, partner? Thank you for wearing that foolish little trinket."

"Well, what could I do?" said Patricia reasonably. "I was afraid it would be a breach of hospitality to throw it at your head. But this is the last time, really, Mr. Royle. You must not spend your money on this family. I am going to be very firm."

"But kind," supplemented Christopher. "I am very easily managed by simple kindness."

"Thank you. I have one child to manage already."

"But I am helping you there, remember. You should have heard me being a father to him this morning. I flatter myself I did it rather well."

"Poor Michael. Don't forget he has to bear with one amateur parent already."

"Yes, but surely he ought to have a complete set."

Christopher stole a glance at her to see how she was taking this and she looked up and caught it, with mischievous delight.

"Yes, I don't wonder you are alarmed," she said. "It would have served you right if I had said 'this is so sudden,' so let that be a lesson to you, or one of these days you will be snapped up by a designing female."

Christopher, strolling along beside her, considered this danger with becoming meekness, a twinkle in his eye. He couldn't tease her further, for the

subject was too near, and her complete unconsciousness of anything more than a desire to play with words on his part alternately charmed and troubled him. Yet it was much that she was near him, wearing his jeweled ship and ready to laugh at his fooling. He thought: "I'm a jolly lucky devil."

iii

When the little party broke up, Christopher walked back to Dorne with the Winters and was eventually persuaded to waive ceremony and stay to dinner at the Rectory.

"I'm sorry I didn't ask Pat to come too," said Mary, "especially as we shan't see her as usual to-morrow. She and Michael generally lunch with us after Matins, but she tells me she wants to avoid Dorne until the Dedication is over and Miss Duffield has gone back to town. Doris was engaged to Terry Willingdon, you know, and Pat doesn't want her to see Michael."

"She is always thinking of other people," exclaimed Christopher. "I never knew such a girl, but I hate to think she has to skulk in hiding like this. If I dared I'd go and take them both out in the car to-morrow, away from all these people."

"Why not dare?" said Mary. "Faint heart, Mr. Royle . . . I know it is too bad to tease you, but Pat is the most natural creature in the world, and she regards you as a friend."

"That's why it seems unfair to rush her," said Christopher with sudden diffidence. "But oh, lord,

the way you've found me out is awful. That comes of living away from civilization for so long. I evidently wear my heart, faint or otherwise, on my sleeve."

"I'm not so sure you are as guileless as all that," returned Mary. "You are more like a wily diplomat making secret treaties with a friendly power to help your conquest. It's all right. You have our full support. I'll answer for Austin."

"I've already answered for myself, thank you," said Austin, mildly. "I rather agree with you about the hiding, Royle. One feels a hypocrite to let her do it, yet Pat is perfectly right with regard to Miss Duffield. This muddle was no fault of hers, poor child. My wife doesn't care for her, but I know her better. She is the kindest little thing . . . spends any amount of her own money on the village and gets neither credit nor thanks for it. I think on the whole you might persuade Pat to the drive, and it would certainly do her the world of good. She has altogether too little amusement, and whatever else you do, you seem to amuse her. She has quite come out of her shell under all your chaffing."

"Yes, but is that a good sign?" inquired Christopher, doubtfully. "Come along now, Winter, as man to man! You ought to know."

"What a fellow you are for meeting trouble half way," laughed Austin. "Hang it all, old man, go and find out for yourself."

Fortified by this advice, Christopher enjoyed his evening, most of which he spent yarning about books

in Austin's study, while Mary tactfully busied herself elsewhere.

"I want to make a raid here," Christopher said, wandering round the rector's bookshelves and reading titles eagerly. "Lord, but I'm rusty."

"Borrow anything you like," invited Austin.

"That's awfully good of you. I will. Here is something I should like to take for a day or two if you will trust me with it . . . the second volume of 'Songs of To-day.' It came out after I left England, and the first volume I know more or less by heart, as I took it with me and had precious little else."

Christopher opened the book and saw on the fly leaf, "To Austin from Pat," and was immediately reminded of the momentous letter which he carried, and of the first strange picture it had given him of the girl he now seemed to know better than all the world. At Austin's nod of consent he put the little volume in his pocket and returned to his chair.

"I must get you to give me a list of the best of this recent stuff," he said. "Poetry in particular. I remember, just about the time I left England, there were one or two pretty good people coming on, but I have only seen scraps since."

"Pat will help you there more than I," said Austin. "Most of that modern verse belongs to her, you will find. She is always trying to upset what she calls my middle class and middle-aged prejudice that nobody can be a poet until he is dead, because I stand or fall by the classics."

"She *would* have the courage of her convictions," exclaimed Christopher, delighted, "for that's what it amounts to after all, a lack of courage . . . the old idea that a work of art can't be judged by its own generation, but only by posterity. In heaven's name, why can't it?"

"Because great art is universal and if it only touches the emotion and experience of one generation, it is not universal and not art. And how can we tell until time has tested it?"

"Haven't you even the pluck to have a whack at a prophecy?" protested Christopher. "Just look at the drivel that has stood the test of time as you call it. 'The cottage was a thatched one' and stacks more bathos of the kind in your so-called classics! Do you mean to tell me the worst of this modern stuff hasn't more right to live than that?"

"It's no good, my boy," smiled Austin. "Every generation thinks the one before it archaic and always will. I am a back number to you and Pat and you are equally antique to the youngsters of twenty. We are each of us antagonistic to the other."

"I haven't met the twenty gang," said Christopher with interest. "They are hard little nuts from all accounts. Queer that, you know. It's the War, I suppose. They were just too young to realize the catastrophe but old enough to suffer from its results."

"It is bravado to some extent, I think," said Austin, "a reaction from the flood of emotion that hit

their elders. There's nothing wrong with the twenties really."

"I like your antagonism to the other generation, I must say," grinned Christopher. "What a fraud you are. Now I am going to clear out because of course you'll be up at dawn to-morrow converting the heathen. Better begin with Mrs. Willingdon. She's no credit to you."

"Did Pat ask you anything about that encounter?" inquired Austin, accompanying his guest to the door.

"Yes, and I lied like blazes, which just shows you what a bad influence Mrs. Willingdon is in your parish. You take my advice and speak to the Bishop about her," said Christopher with wicked enjoyment.

iv

At the Inn he found a letter waiting for him from Mr. Ponder, who, with exemplary promptitude, had sent a confidential messenger to the War Office, for the details about young Willingdon. The details in question were something of an anti-climax now and Christopher checked them through, feeling that this was a phase of the situation no longer important.

The boy had been gazetted second lieutenant in 1916, gone to France in the following March, been twice mentioned in despatches, promoted, won the M.C. and D.S.O. for conspicuous bravery, and been killed in action on November 11th, 1918.

"You will be glad to learn that the young officer

for whom you were inquiring had a particularly gallant record," wrote Mr. Ponder, in a tone of congratulation, as though the firm of Ponder and James had brought it about at great trouble and expense. "We are pleased to be able to furnish you with the details of his war service, which will no doubt be a source of consolation to the friend in Africa on whose behalf you applied to us. If there is any other service we can do for you in this connection, we hope you will command us."

"Good old Ponder," thought Christopher, burning this effusion. "I suppose it is quite a consolation to him to think I have such respectable acquaintances." He burned the details from the War Office also, then remembering Pat's letter, brought it out, thinking the time had come when it would be better destroyed.

He laid it beside Austin's book. Yes, the writing was the same, of course. There could be no mistaking it. Then he read it again, though he knew it by heart, with a sense of the strangeness and beauty of the little story, of which it was a shadow.

She had done a perfectly simple thing, and though she would never see it, that, to Christopher's mind, was where the beauty lay. She was no penny wonder but just a bewildered girl, doing a job that had to be done without foreseeing the consequences, yet facing them when they came. He loved her. Her anxious fear of fussing over Michael, her thoughtfulness for Miss Duffield, her fierce anger against Mrs. Willingdon who had never given Terry a

chance, her readiness to laugh at herself and the whole situation, seemed sweet to him; and however small a place he was to take in her story, he felt he owed much to the dying man who had placed the letter and this knowledge of her in his hands. Certainly he owed him silence.

He took up the letter and lit a match. Then on a sudden blew it out again.

Patricia came first after all. He could not destroy what might be the one sure way of silencing Mrs. Willingdon's evil tongue.

CHAPTER XVI

i

PATRICIA, at work in the garden about ten o'clock on Sunday morning, saw Christopher's car coming up the drive and went to meet it unsuspectingly.

"I hope you'll have the grace to do a little fishing to-day, if only to ease my conscience," she said, greeting him gayly, as he drew up before the house.

"What, break the fishes' sabbath? Certainly not," said Christopher. "Besides, we all need a change of air. Let's go to Somerset."

"What in the world is the matter with you now?" asked Patricia.

"I'm tired of Gloucestershire."

"Already? Why, I thought you liked it."

"Yes, but I simply hate some of the people in it," declared Christopher in a confidential tone. "And anyway we mustn't be provincial. We ought to give some of the other counties a look over now and then. Come along, you and Michael and Blinkers and me . . . just for the day."

She shook her head.

"You would be a marked man, Mr. Royle," she said.

"That's my one ambition in life."

"You know very well what I mean."

"Of course, if you don't like to be seen with me," said Christopher, endeavoring to look offended. "Anyhow, the village gossips will be safely in church, if that fellow Winter is doing his duty."

"That reminds me," exclaimed Patricia. "I thought you had promised to go and hear Austin's sermon?"

"It's a bad one this morning, so he let me off. He says you may come, by the way, and so does Mrs. Winter. There now!"

"If you dared to ask their permission," flared the girl. "It was like your impertinence."

"But I didn't. Being terrified to death of you, I simply asked if they thought you would tear me up at the suggestion and they said certainly not. Little they know you."

She laughed.

"Oh, dear, you have an answer to everything, and it really is very tempting. I wonder if we might. Perhaps Mrs. Cope could pack us a luncheon basket."

"What a slave driver you are," said Christopher. "Give the poor old thing a rest for once. We'll get a crust at Gloucester or Bath or somewhere. There's really quite a good stock of food in the country."

"You oughtn't to be allowed to have your own way about everything," declared the girl. "I'm sure it's very bad for you. And we can't go to Somerset and back in a day. It's absurd."

"I didn't propose to walk," said Christopher, "or were you chucking off at my bus? If you are not careful, Miss Eden, I'll get you to Somerset in half an hour. Now let's have no more of this nonsense. I am going to call up my crew."

Three blasts on the horn brought the crew running.

"Get your things, Captain," commanded Christopher. "We are going out for the day."

"Oh, Pat, may I?" cried Michael.

"Pat's coming too," explained the young man calmly, "so you and Blinkers must take the back seat."

Then at something in the girl's faint smile, as the little boy ran indoors, he bent down and whispered to her:

"Only metaphorically, of course."

"I won't have you reading my thoughts like that," cried Patricia, indignant because for some reason she wanted to cry.

"I won't read another all day long, you darling," promised the young man.

"Mr. Royle, do you realize we haven't known each other a week?"

"A week? Is it as much as that? How the time does fly. Then it is high time you dropped titles and ceremonies and called me Christopher."

"Of course I won't."

"Oh, please. Nobody calls me Christopher and it makes me feel so lonely. Besides, I called you Pat."

"Then you mustn't and I wish you'd take Michael and let me stay at home."

"We all go or none of us go," said Christopher with determination; then softened at the look of trouble on her face. "Be kind to me," he begged.

Patricia was troubled, for it had seemed so fair a prospect to get off for a whole carefree day from Dorne and its curious eyes; but at last she had a glimpse of where this was leading her, and was frightened by the quick beating of her heart. It wouldn't do. She must be firm with this very impetuous young man.

As though once more he divined her thoughts, Christopher said:

"I know I'm a fool to rush you like this. I hadn't meant to yet a while, but how could I help loving you even in a week?"

"No, no, you mustn't," she interrupted. "It's quite impossible . . . we can't."

"You are thinking of Michael," said Christopher gently. "I'd be so good to the little chap, for his own sake as well as for yours."

"No, I was not thinking only of Michael. I was thinking of you. You are so reckless, dashing into . . . into danger," said Patricia in a shaking voice, "and you don't in the least know what you would be shouldering. I couldn't let you."

"You've shouldered it," he pointed out, "and am I less a man than you? Don't be so conceited. Oh, my dear, don't take any notice of my fooling and give me a chance. I can't expect you to care for

me. You hardly know me, though I have learned to know you better in a few days than I could know any other woman in a hundred years. I can't bear to see you look so troubled. Forget all about it for the present and let us have our day and be happy. Besides," he added hopefully, "you might get to know me quite well in a day. I'll tell you one thing. All my own people detested the sight of me and that is a great recommendation, if you only knew it."

"Oh, dear," she said, half laughing and yet with a sigh, "I'll come, but only as a friend. You must leave it at that. You must really, for I am so afraid and so horribly inexperienced and . . . here's Michael. I had better run."

When she returned Michael and Christopher had already agreed upon the route and the youngster was installed in the back seat with Blinkers, a road map held importantly before him.

"I have to look out for all the sign-posts," he said. "I say, Pat, isn't this a lark?"

Patricia was amused at Christopher's transparent ruse to keep him busy.

He helped her in, tucking the rug about her, then turned the car down the drive.

"What speed does the lady of the house prefer?" he asked her, "Fifty miles, forty-five, thirty, all speeds kept in stock."

"I don't mind how fast we get out of Dorne," she declared, "but after that don't you think we might be reasonable? I am sure you can't talk if you are going at fifty miles an hour."

"Hurrah! Then I may talk? One mark for conversation."

"Not at all," corrected Patricia. "I simply thought you couldn't help it."

"This," he said, shaking his head, "is evidently going to be a very quarrelsome journey. Now if you don't like the way I am driving, you'll tell me, won't you, because these little things are so important . . . between friends."

"Right turn," called Michael at this moment, and Patricia laughed.

"What a tactful child," she said.

Christopher teased her no more.

They drove through lovely country, a young wind racing beside them, stirring the grasses and the first poppies, red among the ripening wheat. Old towns and villages, sleeping in a Sunday calm, swept by, and new roads opened before them, like that road of romance she had thought closed forever, but which now lay shining under her dazzled eyes. She had cherished this swift friendship, dreaming of nothing more, but now with Christopher beside her, his hand steady on the wheel, she was happy and she could not be afraid.

ii

Hours later Christopher Royle drove slowly along beside the belt of woods that sheltered Windyhill. Just below them lay his home, that old house of his dreams, and the terraced gardens rich with flowers. He could not tell her, for he felt it would

be unfair. How could he offer her so much beauty, when she must take him as well and he had no right to think that she cared for him yet? It was enough for the moment to have her here beside him in this place he loved.

She put her hand on his arm.

"Do let us stop here for a little while," she said. "Those gardens and that perfect house . . . look, on our left! And such a glorious view."

"Fine country round here," Christopher heard himself saying in a voice half strange as he pulled up the car. And because he could not look at her, he turned to the youngsters in the back and said:

"Now then, you two rascals, want a run?"

The rascals did, and Christopher, offering Patricia a cigarette, said shyly:

"You don't mind, do you? It must be so hard for the little chap to sit still for hours on end."

"Of course I don't mind," she said, "but I won't have a cigarette just now. I am loving it all too much. Do smoke your pipe. I like to see it."

Christopher filled it and they sat silent.

"I dined with the Winters last night," he observed after awhile, "and that reminds me, I've found you out."

"You have done nothing else since we met," declared Patricia.

"Ah, but this is serious. I poked about Winter's book shelves, so you can take it from me that all is discovered. You are a blue-stocking."

"Rip Van Winkle! Why, such creatures went out with Mrs. Grundy."

"Did they? But of course I am a Rip Van Winkle. I want you to help bring my education up to date . . . in a friendly way, of course."

The postscript touched her, but she could not help tormenting him a little.

"Would you really let me, in a friendly way?" she asked. "Wouldn't you just rush away from Dorne and never come back?"

"And forget my partner? What an insinuation," said Christopher. Then he added, somewhat unsteadily: "You mustn't think all that talk about old Michael the other night had any bearing on what I said to you this morning. It hadn't really. I wanted to have the fun of sending the lad to Winchester from the first, though I was so much afraid of you then that I thought I'd have to manage it by stealth."

"You concealed your fear of me awfully well," said Patricia demurely. "I wonder why you thought it would be fun to spend all that money on Michael?"

"Oh, well . . . he is such a nice kid and I had a pretty good time there and . . . in a sort of way that I can't explain, it was a good deal on account of that poor chap his father."

"You're a dear to tell me that," exclaimed Patricia, naturally misunderstanding how the impulse had been born. "I'd much rather you did it for Terry's sake than for mine."

"Oh, lord, she did love him then," thought Christopher, his heart sinking, but he put his hand over hers and squeezed it gently, and she did not draw it away.

"Do tell me something about your boyhood," she said.

"Lean forward a bit," said Christopher. "See that old farm on the slope down there? That's Windy and I had no end of larks there when I was a youngster. An old chap named Pollock had it. He was only a tenant, but his people had farmed Windy for two hundred years, and, by Jove, he was a wonder . . . quite a fanatic about it. I think when you've belonged to a place through generations like that, it is in your blood and you are almost part of it. When I came home the other day I found poor old Pollock had had a row with the owner and been turned out. He was sixty and he'd had to emigrate."

"The poor old dear," cried Pat. "What a cruel shame. Why, it would be enough to kill a man like that."

"God, I hope it hasn't, because he's coming back to Windy, if money can bring him."

"You are a fairy godfather to everybody."

"Oh, lord no, you don't understand," cried Christopher distressed. It seemed to him that through sheer inability to explain himself, he was forever parading before her in all sorts of virtues he did not possess. "I had to look after old Pollock because . . ."

Windyhill and he couldn't tell her, yet he played with the idea.

"Like me to show you the first love of my life?" he said, hardly knowing what it was he meant to do.

She looked at him smiling.

"Unless you have a mirror in the car I think that's almost rude," she said, then suddenly buried her head in his arm: "Oh, Christopher, I can't be strong-minded when you are such a darling. Are we both mad?"

"Sane, my sweet," said Christopher, his arm about her, gathering her close.

"From the very first moment you've been so good to me," she whispered presently, "and so . . . so understanding. I can't believe it."

"Hush," he said, "my first love's listening. Look, Pat, here below us. It's my home."

They turned their happy eyes to Windyhill.

"Yours?" said Pat. "Oh, Christopher, is it really yours?"

"We call it Windyhill," he told her. "It's mine now . . . some day, I hope, your son's."

"Oh, dear, now you've done it," cried Pat. "You'll never be able to get rid of me after this."

"I knew you'd love it, my darling, though I thought I couldn't show it to you because it would seem like bribery. That's how I feel about these acres of my home. Do you know those lines of de la Mare's:

—when that child called Spring and all
His host of children come,
Scattering the seeds and flowers upon
These acres of my home . . .'

When I first read that, out in France, and thought of Windyhill, I was so homesick I could have howled like a kid, though I never dreamt it would be mine in those days. Then six months ago my brother died without a son and it came to me. Poor chap, I understand now how bitter that must have been."

"Windyhill is in your blood," said Pat, "and that is why you understand about poor old Pollock. He is one of your people."

"One of my friends," said Christopher. "You'll like old Pollock and so will Michael. Oh, Pat, my sweet, I am a lucky fellow. I've been seeing you at Windyhill for days and Michael and Blinkers waking the old place up. The little chap shall never feel out of it because he can't inherit Windyhill some day, for I know what that means. We'll make it up to Michael."

"Don't give me the world," begged Patricia in a shaking voice.

"You've given me heaven, so it isn't even a fair exchange," said Christopher.

Michael came racing back to them, and Patricia drew herself gently out of her lover's arms.

"I say, Pat, you should see that house down there. It's got funny cut out trees and hilly sort of lawns

that would be simply scrumptious to slide down," said Michael.

The two in the car exchanged a glance.

"On a tin tray," supplemented Christopher gravely. "Eh, Michael?"

"Oh, but they'd never let you," said Michael with a regretful grin. "Uncle Christopher, do you think I could go into that wood?"

"Yes, run along, old man. We're not going for a little while, but keep the car in sight, there's a good fellow. If you don't," said Christopher, suddenly fierce, "there *will* be a row."

"Oh, rather," said Michael in amiable agreement, and departed.

"Have to get my hand in," explained Christopher. "Poor chap, he little knows what's before him. I thought you'd rather break it to him gently when you get him home."

Patricia, moved as ever by his understanding, answered after a moment:

"It won't be very hard to tell him he's to have everything I have always wanted to give him and was afraid I never could. I am so glad he will have a man to bring him up, but I'm dreadfully afraid it may be unfair to you. What will your people say?"

"I have no people to say anything," he assured her, thinking with wicked enjoyment of Adelaide, and what her reaction to young Michael would most certainly be. She'd think the boy part of that misspent youth of which she and Herbert had always

suspected him. "As for being unfair to me, don't you dare to think it again. I won't allow it."

"It's no good trying to bring me up, as well as Michael," argued Patricia amused. "I am much too old . . . nearly thirty-one."

"Below zero? Poor cold little darling, let me keep you warm." He drew her head down on his shoulder and told her the story of his home-coming, when he had found Windyhill flung to the wolves. "You don't know what a bad tempered fellow you are going to marry," he finished, having painted his treatment of everyone concerned in lurid colors.

"Yes, I do," Pat assured him without alarm. "I know you have a temper because I've seen you scowl."

"Scowl in your presence? Never."

"Yes, when you mentioned Mrs. Willingdon. Oh, it is not surprising that I think you rather a wonder, Christopher. You didn't know me, yet you wouldn't believe the things she said."

Her letter to Terry lay in his pocketbook, just beneath her head, but because he could not show it to her, he knew he must wear this halo for special understanding to the end of his days.

"Marry me quickly," he begged, "and let me take you away from Dorne, before I murder Mrs. Willingdon."

iii

It was dusk before they reached home and Michael, with the rug tucked round him, was asleep,

with Blinkers dozing at his feet. Seeing a light in the Rectory, Christopher stopped the car.

"I thought you'd like to go in for half an hour," he whispered. "I'll take the youngster home to Mrs. Cope and come back for you."

Patricia, giving his hand a grateful squeeze, got out quietly, but Michael woke up.

"It's all right, old man. Pat is going in to see your Aunt Mary for a few minutes," said Christopher. "You and I are going on to Woden."

"I'm coming in with you then," said Michael promptly hopping over the seat. Blinkers, finding himself deserted, curled up on the rug and returned to his dreams.

"Did you like the house with the slopey lawns?" inquired Christopher.

"Jolly decent," said Michael.

"That's where I was born, and you and I are going to have some great larks there before long. We'll get a couple of trays to start with, eh? I'll want a pretty big one, don't you think?"

"Oh, Uncle Christopher, you would look a scream."

"Well, you're a nice sort of fellow. Do you think you are going to have all the fun to yourself?"

Christopher put his left arm round the boy's shoulder.

"We're pretty good pals, you and I, aren't we?"

"Rather," said Michael and curled himself happily up on the seat.

"Then, as pal to pal, I want you to do me a

special favor. If you're awake when Pat comes home to-night, give her a good hug. Girls like that sort of thing now and then."

Michael nodded.

"They're pretty funny, aren't they?" he said. "All right, but she doesn't often make me."

"Sensible sort of girl," suggested Christopher.

"Yes, isn't she?" said Michael.

Mary and Austin, meanwhile, had greeted Patricia's appearance alone, with surprise.

"I thought I heard a car," said Mary.

"Yes, I got out of it," explained Patricia.

"Why, you haven't quarreled with the driver, I hope?"

"No, he's taken Michael home to bed. He is coming back for me in a moment."

"Mr. Royle has quite a fatherly way with that child," said Mary, watching the girl's bright cheeks with mischief in her eyes.

Patricia laughed, then caught the rector's arm.

"Oh, Austin, don't let me marry him if it isn't fair to him," she begged, suddenly fearful again.

Austin kissed her.

"He's a very lucky chap, my dear," he said.

"Nice goings-on," said Mary, watching this little performance with pretended indignation. "Just for that I shall kiss your Christopher. I have been wanting to do it for days."

CHAPTER XVII

i

DORIS was worried. Throughout Saturday Mrs. Willingdon's mysterious illness continued, while the Colonel walked restlessly about the house, watching his wife's door, and snapping at everybody who spoke to him; and the old lady summoned the girl from time to time to discourse on the wickedness of Patricia, plan her disclosures to the Bishop, and wonder when a reply might be expected from Sir Peter, to the letter which she assumed Doris had written him.

Doris felt guilty and disloyal and miserable. Mrs. Willingdon would hear no word in defense of Pat and, at last, to divert her mind, Doris led the talk round to the Window, and not being clever at such tactics, found herself confessing that she had seen it.

The old woman burst into reproachful tears.

How could her darling Doris have been so cruel as to go and see Terry's Window without his mother?

"It will look so odd, love," wept Mrs. Willingdon, "and I don't think it showed at all a nice feeling on the rector's part to lead you into it. You didn't understand, I know, darling, so easily led as

you are, but I ought to see my boy's Window before anybody. I don't know what the Colonel would say."

"I am so sorry, dearest," said Doris unhappily.

"And no doubt," continued Mrs. Willingdon, "he is showing it to every Dick, Tom and Harry."

"Oh no, he isn't really. He told me nobody had seen it because that was your wish," explained Doris in eager defense of the rector. "But he thought . . . he thought that wouldn't apply to me."

"It's my Window," sobbed Mrs. Willingdon. "And how do I know he hasn't shown it to that wicked girl and that dreadful Mr. Royle. It makes me ill to think of it, my darling."

Doris put her arms about the old lady.

"You want a change," she said soothingly. "When the Dedication is over, don't you think we might go away together just for a week or two down to the sea? It would do you so much good, dearest, and put all this worry out of your mind."

"Yes, I want a change," said Mrs. Willingdon eagerly, "but my dear John will grumble so at the expense, and you know what it is, love, he hates me to go away. Men are so selfish, even the best of them. The Colonel is quite angry when I say I need a change."

"He needn't be troubled about the expense," urged Doris. "You would let me pay for a little thing like that, surely. Won't you tell the Colonel that you have been invited to go away for a few days?"

"But then, darling," continued Mrs. Willingdon, complacently, "he's so jealous of you. My John is jealous of everybody who loves me, the dear, silly fellow."

"Jealous of me?" Doris was pathetically amazed that anybody could be jealous of her. Perhaps, after all, the Colonel did not really dislike her then, but merely hated the fact that his wife was fond of her. Doris could understand that feeling and she was immensely sorry for the Colonel, wanting to reassure him.

For the moment at least she had diverted Mrs. Willingdon's attention from Patricia and the Window, and the old lady spent Saturday evening planning how she could deceive her John and bring the little holiday about; where they should go and what she would wear when she got there. That Doris should have any say in their destination did not seem to occur to her, but the girl did not mind, only too glad to see that she was happy again.

On Sunday morning Mrs. Willingdon had so far recovered her spirits as to insist that she and Doris should go early to the church that she might see her beautiful Window.

"We'll go before the rabble, darling," she said, "and you shall pull the curtain aside for me and I shall see it all to myself. Then we'll say a few little prayers, love, and come home. I don't feel I can sit through a long service, ill as I am. But you'll put on a black frock, won't you, my Doris? So much more fitting, dear."

Doris wore the black frock, though she hated it, and went with Mrs. Willingdon and pulled the curtain aside, loyally yet with difficulty averting her eyes from the Window that Terry's mother might see it alone. And Mrs. Willingdon wept and prayed and at last, in a satisfied manner, dried her lovely eyes and said they would go home.

They had just reached the churchyard gate when Christopher Royle's car drove by, carrying its happy cargo to Windyhill.

Mrs. Willingdon, short-sighted though she was, could not mistake the car, for there was no other like it in Dorne, and a flash of a white frock in the front seat beside the driver, and the sight of the child and dog at the back, told their own story.

Doris got her home with difficulty, for she was almost hysterical; and throughout the afternoon she lay in her darkened room, while Doris and the Colonel wandered about the house, the one fearing and the other hoping to be summoned to her.

ii

With her early morning tea on Monday, Doris received her summons. Mrs. Willingdon begged that Miss Duffield would come to her at once. Doris, used to such commands at Dorne, but tired after a wretched night, slipped into a silk dressing-gown and went to obey.

"Oh, my love," cried Mrs. Willingdon, holding out her arms. "I've seen it all. A dream, darling.

The truth has been shown me about that wicked girl and that terrible young man. He is the father, my Doris . . . the child's father, obviously."

"Oh, no," said Doris.

"Yes, indeed he is, and now I see it all. I prayed before my Terry's window and light has been given me."

"You . . . you have let it worry you too much," stammered Doris. "There, there, don't think of it any more."

"But we must think of it, for it's a very wicked thing," said Mrs. Willingdon eagerly. "Ah, you don't understand the wickedness of the world, such an innocent as you are. And to think the scoundrel hinted it to my face. He told me and I didn't see it, for of course a gentleman wouldn't say such things to a lady, and I have known only gentlemen hitherto," finished Mrs. Willingdon with great dignity.

"I am sure you must be mistaken, dearest."

"Mistaken? I am never mistaken, and he told me so himself. He boasted of it in so many words," cried Mrs. Willingdon, triumphantly persuading herself that this was a fact. "What the Colonel would say if he knew I dread to think. Take it from me, love, he would thrash the fellow within an inch of his life. I know my John. But now we have something definite to go upon, and we'll write it all down together so that it will be quite clear to tell the Bishop. No letter from Sir Peter yet, pet?"

"No," said Doris, faintly. "There couldn't be a letter yet. I wish you wouldn't let all this upset you so. Suppose . . . suppose he is the little boy's father? Why should you mind?"

"Ah, you little know," said the old lady with a sudden look of fright. "Such . . . such lies as have been told. If the Colonel were to find out! They are living in sin, depend upon it," she finished, pulling herself together, "and as a Christian community that we can't allow. It is a pity we didn't know it before so that you could tell your dear father."

Doris on that final note, which sent a flood of color to her pale cheeks, escaped at last and went to her room to dress, wishing herself miles from Dorne.

She had seen Mrs. Willingdon's storms before, but never one so irrelevant as this, and Pat's connection with it puzzled more than anything. Was Mr. Royle really the father of the little boy? Had he deceived poor Pat and left her and now come back? Doris's romantic heart stirred at the thought, for if he had come back he must love her. Mrs. Willingdon's excitement receded into the background somewhat in Doris's wistful contemplation of the drama it suggested.

Going down to breakfast she found a letter waiting for her and guessed immediately that it came from Woden. She had alternately longed and feared to see it and now tore it open with fingers that trembled.

"Dear Doris," she read,

"It was sweet of you to send me the fruit, but you mustn't do it again because I can't make any return for such generous gifts. I am sure you will understand.

"Don't worry about not having come to see me. It was much better in a little place like Dorne.

"If I can manage to meet you in town some day, I shan't forget to write and let you know, but I go up very seldom, and nearly always in a violent hurry.

"Yours, with love,
"PAT EDEN."

Doris tucked this letter into the front of her frock, happy at its friendly tone and wanting to tell everyone about it. She dared not mention it, however, unless to the Colonel. She wondered if he would come down this morning before Mrs. Willingdon who never rose till midday. He had been kind about Pat, but Doris, never at her ease with him, was by no means sure she would have the courage to mention anything. It was silly of her, she knew, because if she could only talk things over with the Colonel she might discover what Mrs. Willingdon's excitement really meant.

iii

Colonel Willingdon could bear it no longer. For days he had seen his darling only for brief and agitated moments, when she clung to his hand and

said she was ill and he must leave her to rest; yet all day long that girl was in and out with her and he could hear their voices, chatter, chatter, chatter.

He knew these illnesses. They meant mischief every time, and God only knew what this one might portend. His lovely wife was such a child in the hands of other people, and this was her way of dodging retribution for some childish indiscretion. To the man who loved her there was something infinitely appealing about it, but this time he was alarmed, for of late her indiscretions had brought him near to ruin. There had been the money borrowed behind his back from that fellow Duffield for the Window. He had given in to her at last, because how could he refuse her? But the guilty knowledge never left him that he hadn't the vaguest hope of paying it back. He, an upright man, was reduced to this. Practically a thief she'd made him, but, bless you, she didn't know it. You couldn't make a woman understand.

And now the Duffield girl was running her into something else no doubt, and then where would he be? Like father, like daughter, bad stock they were, the pair of them. Well, he'd have to sink his pride and ask her. He'd go to her and say: "What's the trouble with my wife? I won't have any more of this nonsense. Out with it." He'd be firm for once.

He found her in the drawing room, one of her eternal novels in her hands . . . the pale creature.

Why couldn't she get out into the air, a fine morning like this?

"Good morning, dear," said Doris eagerly, so anxious to please him that she dropped her book, making a clatter that went through his head.

"Why can't you get out of doors?" said the Colonel with irritation.

"Well, I will, dear. I think it will be nice out of doors. Silly of me not to have thought of it before. I'll take your chair out, shall I?"

"Bless my soul, don't begin lugging that thing about. Heavy for you," said the Colonel, remembering his manners. He closed the door and stood against it. "What's the matter with my wife?" said the Colonel firmly.

"She's tired, dear," said Doris.

"Tired? Stuff and nonsense! We're all tired. I've been tired for years. Now then, you've seen her day in and day out and I want the truth of it. What does this illness mean?"

"I don't know," said Doris in a flustered voice. "You mustn't ask me. . . . She doesn't want you to be worried."

"God, I'll know the truth before you leave this room. I've had enough of it. Am I a child to be put off like this?" cried the Colonel. "Ever since her drive with that nice young fellow, What's-his-name, you've been at it, whispering and running about and making a mystery of my wife's illness, and then you tell me she doesn't want me to be worried. Where's the sense of it?"

"I . . . I think Mr. Royle upset her," whispered Doris.

"Great heaven, are you all mad? If there was an accident why wasn't I informed at once? A doctor must be sent for immediately," exclaimed the Colonel opening the door with agitation; but Doris called him back.

"No, no, there wasn't an accident. Silly of me to put it like that, dear. It was something he said that upset her."

"Said? What could the young fellow say to upset my wife? He seemed a nice fellow."

"It . . . it was about Pat," faltered Doris.

"Little Pat? God bless my soul . . . what's little Pat to do with it?"

"She thinks . . . the darling says he's the man . . . he practically told her he was the little boy's father."

The Colonel sat down because his relief was so great. His darling was only worrying about little Pat. He had always known she was the sweetest woman at heart, though strictly conventional like all her generation. Victorian, she was. A good woman, Victoria, but narrow and over stout, not a lovely creature like his wife. He'd ridden in her Jubilee Procession. Funny little figure she'd looked, but what a time! Terry had been a baby then. Never thought he'd have to die for his country at twenty-one, but quite right of course. The Colonel felt a soldier's pride in his soldier son. The Field of Honor, he thought, and with the memory of old

campaigns, saw his son lying with the Union Jack about him and the bugler ready to play him to rest.

But that girl was maundering on. Never did know when to stop, the fool.

"So you won't tell her, will you, dear?" finished Doris.

"Eh?" said the Colonel in bewilderment. "What's that?"

"The darling would be frightened if she thought I'd told you. I mean of course you made me, didn't you? And I'm glad really, because I . . . I like Pat," said Doris.

"Yes, yes, that's all right. Don't you worry about that, I'm obliged to you," said the Colonel with magnanimous courtesy.

His darling was troubled about little Pat; and this fellow who had played fast and loose with her was hanging about again, was he? A fine scoundrel! His dear wife was making herself quite ill. Ah, she was the best woman who ever lived, as well as the loveliest. The Colonel hadn't known the rights of that affair of little Pat. Ought to have found out of course . . . poor Eden's daughter. He had thought it was some young fellow who had died in France. But if he was alive and here in Dorne, he wanted kicking. He'd do it himself if necessary, old man as he was.

He got up from his chair and went out into the hall. He found his hat and stick, fingering the latter and feeling suddenly strong enough to thrash the fellow within an inch of his life. Not so old and

feeble after all. He'd find the scoundrel and send him flying about his business, sorry he'd been born. Then he would come back and tell his darling and she wouldn't be worried any more.

Fellow might be going to marry the girl and put things right, thought the Colonel, going down the drive, the morning sunshine warm about him. Or was it a pack of nonsense? Women were born muddlers and you never knew. Better make certain perhaps. He'd step along to the Rectory and have a word with Winter about it. Sensible fellow, Winter, precious little cant about him and played a dam' fine game of chess. Man of the world in spite of his clerical collar. He would know.

The Colonel walked through the village and in at the Rectory gate, feeling better than he had done for years. Exercise was good for a man. He must take more of it and get about a bit. The flowers and the order of the little garden pleased him and he sighed, thinking of his poor Manor and no money to put it right. They'd have to sell it when he was gone, but what with the mortgages and the bad times, there would be precious little over if anything . . . not enough to settle that fellow Duffield's debt. He shouldn't have given in to her, but loving her, what could he do?

Austin came out of his study to greet the old man with pleasure and surprise.

"It is good to see you out, Colonel," he said. "I hope that means you are really better."

"Splendid, my boy," said the Colonel smiling.

"Young as I ever was and on the rampage, by gad. I want a word with you."

The rector gave him an easy chair and poured him a whisky and soda, while the Colonel gazed round the book-lined room with wistful eyes. Cozy it looked.

"You want to talk over the Dedication, sir," suggested Austin. "The workmen expect to finish this afternoon, they tell me."

"Ah, the Window," said the old man, a shadow on his face. "No, no, Winter. It's another matter. You know my old friend Eden's daughter . . . little Pat? I'm concerned about her. Who is this fellow Royle? Do you know anything of him?"

"I was at Cambridge with his brother," said the rector levelly. "They are a Somerset family of good stock, and Royle is one of the finest chaps you could hope to meet."

"You relieve me," said the Colonel. "I admit he seems a nice young fellow, but my wife has heard some story that has upset her and made her quite ill. She is the kindest woman in the world, Winter, my dear wife, and dam' it all, a man can't sit nursing his ailments and see a scoundrel playing fast and loose with his old friend's girl. He's not then the father of the little lad at Woden?"

"Michael's father?" echoed Austin, with difficulty controlling his rage. "Certainly not. You have been grossly misinformed, Colonel Willingdon, and you may take it from me that nobody has played fast and loose with Patricia Eden. She is one of

the best women it has been my good fortune to know. As for Royle, she met him in my house less than a week ago for the first time."

"I am delighted to hear it, my dear fellow, delighted. I can't tell you how glad I am to have your word for it. Gossip as usual, no doubt, and a lot of fool women chattering to my dear wife. It will be a great relief to her to know there's nothing in it. Little Pat was always a favorite of mine in the old days," said the Colonel, "but I've neglected her, I'm afraid, out of the world as I am. Well, well, I'm infinitely obliged to you, Winter. You have a nice place here. Now I am so much better, you must let me drop in sometimes when you are not busy. I begin to realize that I have given in too much to my infirmities, but there, one gets into a rut and so it goes on."

"Come whenever you feel able, Colonel," said Austin. "We shall be glad to see you."

His anger against Mrs. Willingdon's latest stroke was so great that he could not trust himself to pursue that subject, for in spite of his protestations of good health, the old man looked too frail to be burdened with the whole story. Austin went with him to the gate at last, offering to see him back to the Manor, but the Colonel, smiling jauntily, protested:

"No, no, my boy. I'll walk a few steps through the village this lovely morning. I haven't felt so well for years."

He set out on his journey.

CHAPTER XVIII

i

THE road to Woden lay straight before him. No distance at all, it looked . . . ten minutes they used to reckon it in the old days from gate to gate, but roads were longer now, thought the Colonel, shaking his head, with a smile. Still he'd do it. He felt fit for a tramp this morning and he would see little Pat and shake her by the hand. The sight of her would do him good.

A cock and bull story! He might have known it, with that fool rushing in and out with her silly chatter, talk, talk, talk to his poor darling in her darkened room. Taken hold of some thing and worked herself into a state about it . . . got it all wrong. That was the explanation. She was so sensitive.

He ought to forbid the Duffield girl the house, upsetting her as she did, but there, there was no getting away from the fact that she was fond of the fool, and women lived on their affections. Terry's girl, she called her. Poor Terry!

The village saw Colonel Willingdon's progress with excitement and surprise, for it was years since he had walked abroad like this. Women bobbed shyly as he passed and men touched their caps, mum-

bling a "Morning, sir." Here and there one of them saluted smartly.

"Good morning to you," said the Colonel, squaring his old shoulders and marching on.

Maginnis, at work in the garden at Woden, saw him coming up the drive and left his tools.

"If it's Miss Pat you're after wanting, sir, sure it's out she is," said Maginnis.

"Out, hey?" said the Colonel.

"She is that, sir. Herself and the young gentleman caught the early bus to Hillthorpe, and seeing it's such a fine day, she says, they'll be walking back through the wood. Won't you come in now and wait awhile? It's not long they'll be, I'm thinking."

"No, no, my man, I won't come in. I'll stroll back through the wood and meet her," said the Colonel.

The wood! He had always meant to go there one day and sit again under the shade of the old trees. He was a little tired and it was a hot morning. As he took the field path, trailing more and more slowly through the long grasses, the wood seemed a haven infinitely alluring.

He came to it at last. Those green rides set in an eternal silence were full of memories for him, and at last he found a seat under an ancient tree, and fell into it with a sigh, half dreaming, half awake.

Long ago he had walked here with his darling, but she had never really liked the wood. Creepy,

she called it, and would never enter it without clinging to his arm.

But, bless you, Terry had never been afraid of the wood . . . never afraid of anything, that young rascal. Even as a little chap, tearing about, up every tree, risking his neck and Pat with him, up to mischief day in and day out. He could see it all as clear as if it were yesterday, those two flying figures and he and poor Eden calling them to order. Stern they had pretended to be, but what bunkum. Proud as punch, they were, the pair of them.

The Colonel could not see the older Terry, and dimly he knew that was all wrong. The boy had been difficult and queer. All his fault, of course. He hadn't understood him. God . . . if he had his time again. . . . He opened his eyes, which were once more full of trouble, conscious of a broken world.

The green silence soothed him a little and he was very tired. He leant his head against the tree trunk and by and by fell into a fitful sleep.

ii

"Pat, I say, Pat, you just watch me."

The boyish shout, like an echo from the past that had been so near him all the morning, pierced the old man's dreams and he awoke to the rush of footsteps and crackle of broken twigs. Jumping to catch a great branch of the tree and riding down it, a small boy dropped at his feet, and for a second the Colonel looked into the bright eyes of his son.

"Terry!" he said.

"Oh, I say, I'm awfully sorry if I made you jump," said Michael Eden.

The Colonel rose, bewildered, passing a hand across his forehead, as Patricia Eden followed Michael, her happy glance changing in a second to one of terror and distress.

"Pat, my dear," said the Colonel, and then in sudden illumination, he turned once more to the child.

"What is your name, my boy?" he said gently, holding out his hand.

"Michael Eden, sir."

The Colonel smiled.

"They should have called you Terry," he said.

"Like the hero?" inquired Michael, with eager interest, and Patricia, her arm about his shoulders, explained:

"Colonel Willingdon is the hero's father, Michael."

At the sudden bright blaze of admiration in his face, she added quickly: "I think you'd better keep Blinkers in sight, old man. Say good-by to the Colonel. I'll follow you in a moment."

Michael departed reluctantly and the Colonel watched him with eyes from which all pain had passed.

"You should have told us, Pat, my dear," he said.

"Oh I did . . . I did," cried Patricia passionately. "I told Mrs. Willingdon when Michael was only a few weeks old, but she wouldn't listen . . .

she wouldn't believe me." Her voice broke. "She said that any woman could say a thing like that about a man when he was dead. She turned me out of the house. I . . . I . . . always supposed you knew."

"God!" said the Colonel, sitting down because he could no longer stand. He put a withered hand over his eyes . . . over his face, which was now ashen gray.

"All my life I've adored her," he said at last. "I've never been strong enough to deny her anything. That's what love can do to a man. Since I lost him I have come to realize that I never knew my son and I've fought this . . . this Window. Oh, I've fought it, but I had to give in to her at last. I'm ruined, Pat, my dear, a ruined and dishonored man, but she has her Window . . . here with the real memorial to poor Terry growing up before our eyes."

In all her life Patricia had never heard such bitterness and before it her own melted away.

"You'd never make her see it," she said pitifully.

"No."

There was no life in his voice now and the strange pallor of his face alarmed her.

"I am sure you ought not to be out, Colonel," she said gently. "Won't you let me walk back with you to the Manor gates? This has been a shock to you, and one day when you are feeling stronger, we'll talk of it again."

"No, no, my dear." He tried to reassure her.

"Go on after the little lad. That chalk pit is dangerous. If I could have afforded it, I should have fenced it long ago, since Duffield neglects his duty; and they are venturesome at his age. I'll sit here quietly and go on by and by. Good-by and thank you!"

She was gone . . . good little Pat, who had made his Terry happy . . . and they had denied her and Terry's son. What could they do for him now? Nothing.

The old man looked towards the Manor, shivering suddenly, the world black before his eyes. It was all over. He was done; all gone, love, duty, manhood, honor, he had sold them all for a piece of colored glass. He had given in to her about the Window as he had given in about everything, letting that fellow Duffield, the swine, advance her the money which he could never pay. . . . Duffield who had always loved her and envied him. And Terry's son! She had known . . . all these years she had known and never told him, while he spent on this and that folly for her every penny he possessed. Ruined, and nothing left but a beggarly pension and the Manor, mortgaged to the hilt and falling into decay.

Terry's father rose shaking to his feet, but he did not turn towards home. Very slowly, with infinite caution, he took the way that Terry's son had gone.

CHAPTER XIX

i

PATRICIA left the old man reluctantly, for he looked so frail that she was half afraid, and a shadow fell across the brightness of her day.

She had been happy that morning. Christopher's first love-letter, sent over by hand from the Inn, had reached her while she was dressing. He was going to town by the early train to buy the ring, but would be with her soon after luncheon, he told her in the middle of six closely-written pages.

They had stayed late at the Rectory the night before, discussing future plans, and she had been at length persuaded to marry Christopher quietly in a fortnight, just before the Winters left Dorne for their summer holiday. They would take Michael and Blinkers with them to the sea, while the bride and bridegroom had a short holiday abroad. By the end of it Windyhill would be free of the wolves and the boy would have a few weeks in his new home before returning to school.

Woden was to be put on the market, but since they could now afford to wait for a fair price for it, Maginnis and Mrs. Cope were to be left in charge, while it was put in thorough repair at Christopher's expense, for Woden was to be the

basis of Michael Eden's fortune. The money for it and Patricia's small capital were to be invested in his name against the day when he should be twenty-one.

Michael was still to be told, and Patricia had planned the expedition to Hillthorpe for this reason, meaning to break the news to him as they walked home. It had seemed so easy at a distance, yet when she tried to broach the subject an odd fear possessed her, and by the time they met Colonel Willingdon the right words had not come.

And now, hurrying on to overtake the boy, old troubles were about her. For years she had bitterly regretted the impulse that had sent her in the December of 1918 to Mrs. Willingdon. In her own terrible desolation at the death of her friend, she had been sorry for Terry's mother, and had imagined in all innocence that it would be a consolation to her, after the first shock of the news, to have this little son. What a blind, sentimental fool she had been! Very plainly Mrs. Willingdon had shown her that, and always in the girl's mind since had been the feeling that she had betrayed Terry and very nearly betrayed Michael too. She had always supposed that Colonel Willingdon knew the story and took his wife's view of it, but now she was filled with pity for him, old and broken and ruined, he had said. And she was glad he knew at last. For he had had no word of blame for Terry, who had always been afraid of him; he had been kind to Michael and he had thanked her.

She did not realize that even now he had inevitably got the story wrong, and had been thanking her, not for her care of Michael, but for the happiness he believed she had given his son.

ii

"Perhaps we'll be asked to the Dedication now, Pat," said Michael, running back to meet her.

Patricia smiled rather sadly at his excited face.

"You and I have something much better than that to think of," she said, finding her courage at last. "Michael, I have a secret for you."

"Oh, what, quick?" cried Michael, hanging on her arm.

"We are going away from Woden."

"Why are we?"

"I am going to marry Uncle Christopher, old man."

"Oh, I say, Pat!"

The girl put her arm around him and held him close.

"Darling Michael, do be glad," she begged. "You are going to have that rich uncle you wanted, to bring you up and send you to Winchester and give you the loveliest time."

"Will I be with you?" said Michael, suddenly suspicious.

"Of course you will, donkey. You don't suppose I'd part with my family for all the rich uncles in the world. There will be you and Blinkers and Uncle Christopher and me, and you'll have a whole

family instead of only half a one and we won't be hard up any more."

"Oh, Pat, what a lark! And can you have a lot of dresses?"

"Dozens," agreed Patricia. "What a queer fellow you are with your dresses."

"Oh, well," said Michael off-handedly. "I've always thought I'd like you to have an awful lot."

Later, with Christopher's arm around her and his ring on her finger, she told him of this conversation.

"The man of the house agrees to the engagement on condition that you give me lots of dresses," she said.

Christopher laughed.

"Good old Michael. That's his way of saying you are the prettiest girl he knows; but I am glad the old lad thought of you. He's a splendid little youngster. If your friend Terry was anything like his son, I don't wonder you were fond of him."

Patricia, leaning against his shoulder, looked up at him and smiled.

"You may say 'loved him' if you like," she said, "because I did love him . . . much as I love Michael, rather desperately, and keeping it very dark. I couldn't ever keep my love for you dark, Christopher. It's different and so awfully sudden. I want to shout it from the house-tops."

"Let's both shout," cried Christopher, kissing her. "Oh, my dear, I'll never be jealous of your two other loves. If you are afraid I may be, just re-

member what I owe them. But for them I should never have known you. I should have fished and moved on, not dreaming what I'd missed."

"My fish have had a lovely time. No one to catch them and champagne for tea," said Patricia. "Aren't we a pair of fools? But of course I knew you weren't jealous or I should never have told you, any more than I could be jealous of that poor girl who was Michael's mother."

"Tell me about her," said Christopher. "Was she as young as he?"

"Oh, younger . . . only nineteen, very pretty and frivolous and so strictly brought up. She was terrified and I think, after Terry was killed, she didn't try to live. She hated poor Michael. She was ashamed of having him, and that's why I gave him my name and had him christened Michael Eden. I couldn't bear him to be grudged a name. Of course that helped Mrs. Willingdon's story, but what does it matter? She would have told it just the same whatever he was called." Once more the shadow fell upon her and she said: "I'm very bitter about Mrs. Willingdon. I must have a horrid nature, I'm afraid. And oh, Christopher, we met the poor old Colonel in the wood this morning, and he saw Michael. It was a shock to him and I feel rather worried. He looked so ill and talked so strangely. Yet he was sweet to Michael and me and he didn't seem to blame Terry. I think I'm glad he knows."

"Don't think of them any more," begged Christo-

pher, thankful that she would soon be far from Dorne and the Willingdons and safe at Windyhill. Sweet to her indeed? And well they might be. He could not even be sorry for the Colonel, when he remembered the Colonel's wife.

He spent the afternoon and evening with Patricia, helping her to sort out books and papers she wished to keep, for there was much to do during the two weeks she would remain at Woden. Michael assisted at these ceremonies, hauled away from time to time by Mrs. Cope, who, as she said darkly to Maginnis, had eyes in her head.

As dusk was falling Christopher walked back to Dorne, and not feeling like turning in for a while, strolled through the village. People were talking excitedly in groups, but he was too deep in his own thoughts to notice this particularly, until, passing the Rectory, he heard an urgent voice calling his name.

"Oh, Christopher, I'm glad that's you," said Mary. "Do come in for a moment. Of course you've heard?"

"Heard what?" he asked.

Mary opened the gate for him and drew him in.

"Austin is at the Manor. . . . I've been waiting for him," she said. "Poor old Colonel Willingdon went out for a walk this morning and didn't come back. They've been searching for him all the afternoon and they found him a couple of hours ago, dead, at the bottom of the old chalk pit."

iii

Dead? . . . and Patricia had met him in the wood this morning. He had recognized young Michael. Inevitably Christopher could see this tragedy only as it might affect the girl he loved, and fierce anger shook him against all the race of Willingdons.

"Look here, do you mind if I wait to have a word with Austin?" he asked Mary.

"Oh, please do," she said eagerly. "He will have had a dreadful time breaking the news to that old woman. Besides, he liked and admired the Colonel so much, and a man will be better for him than I can be at such a time. I should be relieved if you'd stay."

They went into the house and waited helplessly, each heavy with thoughts which seemed better left unspoken. The Colonel had come there that morning for the first time in years, and, though Austin had said he was well, better than he had ever seen him, Mary had been conscious of some trouble behind. She knew the signs of Austin's anger, quiet as it was and rigidly controlled.

"I suppose there will be an inquest," she said suddenly to Christopher, and he, biting hard on his pipe and thinking of Pat, exclaimed:

"Oh, lord!"

When, by eleven, Austin had not come home, he suggested strolling towards the Manor in the hope of meeting him.

"There's no reason why I should keep you up like this," he said to Mrs. Winter.

"I shall stay up in any case. I couldn't rest, but do go and I'll get the spare room ready. Austin will want to talk to you and you had better spend the night here, for you don't want to be dragged into all the chatter at the Inn."

He accepted this suggestion gladly and went out into the cool night air, relieved to be for the moment alone.

Had it been suicide? . . . An old man faced with the sudden knowledge of his son's dishonor and unable to bear it? Somehow such weakness did not fit the little which he had seen of Colonel Willingdon. Yet that would be the world's view, and there would be an inquest, and if they were not careful Michael and Patricia would be involved in it and the whole story would come out at last.

Not many days ago such a revelation had seemed to him above all things desirable, but now he was not so sure. Would it not inevitably tarnish the beauty of the thing that Patricia Eden had done? She had kept Terry Willingdon's secret, laughing at their slanders; she had given her name ungrudgingly to his son. Was all this to be lost because Terry Willingdon's father had been less than a man?

"Jove," said Christopher. "We must keep her out of it."

Austin came at last, walking slowly, as one weary beyond belief. He put his arm in the younger man's, pressing it gratefully.

"Good of you to wait for me, old fellow," he said. "This is a dreadful business."

Christopher nodded.

"I hate to add to your worries," he said after a while, "but I think you'd better know. Pat and Michael met Colonel Willingdon in the wood this morning. He recognized the likeness at once."

The rector's hand gripped his arm hard and for a moment they walked on in silence.

"Does she know?" he asked at last.

"Oh, lord, I hope not. I left her about half past nine and she was tired and going to bed. We'd heard nothing then. Your wife told me the news. I've been waiting with her. She is going to put me up for the night."

"I'm glad of that, because we shall have to think what is to be done. Tell me what happened, if you know."

"She said it was a shock to him, and she was worried because he talked so queerly, but he was sweet to her and Michael. Sweet!" Christopher choked down his rage with difficulty. "She said something more, though, now I remember . . . that the Colonel did not seem to blame his son. Are we crossing our bridges too soon after all?"

"We mostly cross them too soon or too late, Royle," said Austin Winter sadly.

Mary admitted them, with an anxious look at her husband.

"Christopher will mix you a strong whisky and

soda," was all she said. "Don't stay up talking longer than you must."

He kissed her.

"The doctor from Hillthorpe has been here, Mary. He must have been dead for hours, he says. They've got in touch with the coroner and there is to be an inquest at the Inn at three to-morrow afternoon. Go to bed, my dear."

Mary went and the two men faced each other in Austin's study.

"Pat must be kept out of this," said Christopher.

The other man nodded.

"If it can possibly be done, and I think it may, since the inquest is to be so soon. You must go over the first thing in the morning and break the news to her. And if the servants at Woden know of the meeting, keep them from coming into Dorne to-morrow. Mary will follow you as soon as she can. I shall have to give evidence, no doubt. Colonel Willingdon was here this morning."

Something in the rector's voice brought Christopher's eyes to him quickly.

"Here?"

"Yes, for the first time." Austin said nothing of the object of that call, though the memory of it had been heavy upon him all the evening.

"She'll blame herself, of course," he said, "for not having taken Michael away from Dorne, but we mustn't let her. The Colonel spoke of her to me this morning in the kindest way. He said he had always been fond of her and ought to have

looked her up long ago, if he hadn't given way to illness and got into a rut. Tell her that, old man. It may help to make her believe there is nothing in what she is bound to fear about this affair. Frankly, I don't know what to think. To me he had always seemed a man of courage and the highest honor, but he was ill and old and how can we know? As for her taking Michael away from Dorne, that's my responsibility. She spoke to me about it less than a week ago and I strongly opposed it. Perhaps I was wrong. There were serious financial reasons against it for one thing, and I discounted this danger because it seemed too low to let her make such sacrifices for the sake of people who reviled her. I didn't think of the Colonel. I crossed that bridge too late, for we are blind at the best of times. The truth we talk about so glibly is just a phrase, I think. We're not big enough to recognize the real thing."

The rector rose and walked restlessly about the room.

"I've had to comfort that old woman," he said, "knowing that, even if obscurely she is responsible for this tragedy, it's the justest retribution. I've dealt in fine phrases, feeling a hypocrite, but at least I can turn a phrase for a better purpose. Colonel Willingdon came here this morning looking, and feeling, he said, better than he had done for years. He spoke of getting out more and of having given in to his infirmities too much. He must have walked too far, over-estimating his strength, and in a mo-

ment of faintness fallen into the chalk-pit. The first part of that statement is the truth . . . the rest, God knows; but it is the direction in which I shall lead the jury, if it can be led. It is nobody's business, after all, and we've got to think of Pat."

"Thanks, old man," said Christopher.

CHAPTER XX

i

AUSTIN WINTER had already thought of Pat to more purpose than he said. Since Mrs. Willingdon had not seen the Colonel before he left the house that morning, and was supposed to be prostrated by grief, it was easy to contrive that she should not be called to give evidence at the inquest. Austin went farther and warned the household to keep all word of the inquest from her ears; for, with her talent for self-dramatization, he saw that she would inevitably take the center of the stage, with disastrous results to everyone concerned.

With this precaution taken, the inquest became a mere matter of form. The jury were local men, to whose slow minds accident alone would account for the tragedy. They had seen the Colonel walking among them for the first time in years, looking incredibly weak and ill, in comparison with the man they remembered of old. They knew too that tomorrow the Window to the memory of his soldier son was to have been dedicated at St. Michael's. A sad business.

When the doctor and the men who had found the body had given evidence, Miss Duffield was called, for she was the last member of his house-

hold who had seen Colonel Willingdon alive. Any danger there might have been from Doris was discounted by the girl herself, who was more heroic than she knew. It had not occurred to her for a moment that the Colonel's death could have been other than accidental, and she was therefore spared any hint of how much her own disclosures had helped to bring it about. But to her muddled mind, an inquest was a kind of court where witnesses were made to say all sorts of things. Doris, almost glad, though it was wicked of her, she supposed, that the Dedication would have to be postponed and there would be no Bishop at Dorne to-morrow, was determined that wild horses should not drag from her any mention of Patricia Eden.

Her fears were unnecessary. To the jury and to Dorne in general, she was almost a daughter to Colonel and Mrs. Willingdon, for she was to have married their son. Some word of this was passed to the coroner, who was kind to the pale, nervous girl in her black dress, asking her little and soon letting her go.

The rector's evidence followed; the Coroner instructed the jury and a verdict of Accidental Death was returned, with a special vote of sympathy for Mrs. Willingdon.

To Christopher alone, in that crowded little Inn parlor, the irony of that last message struck fully home.

He now knew all the story and saw that, just as

certainly as she had sent her son into exile, Mrs. Willingdon had sent her husband to his death.

Patricia would not believe it had been an accident. White and still under the shock, she had told Christopher that morning the details of the meeting in the wood, and yet that older story of how she had brought Terry Willingdon's son to Woden.

He could see it all. The girl of nineteen, dying in a London boarding-house, leaving a baby of three weeks old, of whom she was ashamed. She had had no people, or admitted to none, and the girl of twenty-one, her only friend and chief mourner, in her impetuous inexperience, had seen but one thing to be done. The boy must go to his father's people. She had paid the other girl's debts and brought the nurse and child home with her to Woden. Then she had set out to break her news to Terry's mother.

"Oh, Christopher," Pat had cried, with bitter self-reproach, "I told you I was a sloppy fool. How could I have been so mad? She was dreadful, and when I came home again, I saw for the first time, though I had never liked her, what she had done to Terry. And I had given her the chance of doing it to Michael too."

"But, my darling, whatever the damned old woman chose to say, you could surely have proved the youngster was young Willingdon's son?" Christopher had protested.

"Do you think I'd have proved it then for anything in the world? Besides, I couldn't. I had de-

stroyed Terry's letter to me, and she was quite right. Any woman can say a thing like that about a man when he is dead. I felt I'd given them both away. I'd given away Terry's secret, and I'd given away the fact that the poor baby hadn't the legal number of parents, even though I didn't dream then that she would give me the credit of being the only one he had." Something of her old humor had come back to Patricia for a moment, only to fade against under another memory. "And now I've been a worse fool still, for I have let myself believe all these years that she would have told the Colonel. And she didn't. I should have taken Michael away from Dorne long ago."

"I won't let you reproach yourself and talk such utter nonsense, Pat. You've had to think of Michael and you've done it. God knows what you haven't done for the boy. Do you hear me. I won't have it."

"Let me cry over spilt milk for a little while, old man," begged the girl. "I won't for long, but I can't help thinking of that poor old man, so bitter because he was ruined by the Window. I'm sure he couldn't bear it."

Yes, Christopher, knowing so much more than she, could see the pity of that, and remembering Terry Willingdon's diamonds, an idea had begun to take shape in his mind, which might perhaps ease the sting of this tragedy for the girl he loved.

"He told me he realized he had never known his son," Pat had continued sadly. "And oh, darling,

I know that's true. She played them off against each other and Terry was always ill at ease with his father. Yet the poor old dear didn't blame him about Michael, I'm sure. It wasn't that that made him do it. And you know he came here to see me yesterday, and Maginnis told me I meant to come back from Hillthorpe through the wood, and he said he'd go that way and meet me. I wonder why he came."

"Because he was fond of you and felt he had neglected you. He told Austin that. Don't wonder any more, my dearest, but just try to realize that whatever happened it was Fate. Here comes old Michael . . . quick."

That at least had revived her, for Michael had not been told; the difficulty of keeping him silent about the meeting in the wood was too great. And throughout the morning as, with Mary Winter's aid, they went through the house, room by room, sorting out such things as she wished to take to Windyhill, Christopher had loved and marveled at her courage and control, with the inquest still to come and no way of guessing what it might not disclose.

Now that it was safely over, without disclosure of any kind, he was able to breathe a sigh of relief; but before hurrying back with his news to Woden, he was keenly anxious for a word with Austin Winter, and he waited to catch his eye.

The rector managed to reach him at last and eagerly drew him aside.

"How is she?" he asked.

"She'll never believe this verdict," answered Christopher, in a low voice, "and between ourselves neither can I, but we can't talk here. I suppose you must go back with Miss Duffield? Shall I see you to-night?"

"I wish you would, my boy. I am Colonel Willingdon's executor, and his man of business is waiting for me now; and there are endless things to attend to besides. If I can get through by a reasonable hour, I'll walk over to Woden, because I'd like to have a word with Pat. Give her my love and tell Mary I think she had better stay there to-night. If I'm not with you by ten, come to the Rectory."

"I'm glad you are the executor," he said, "though it is no kindness to you with that old woman's affairs on your hands. Look here, Austin, he told Pat he was ruined by the Window. That's what convinces her it was no accident. Do find out if there is any truth in it, old man, and give me a hint in confidence to-night, if you possibly can. I have a particular reason for asking."

"Ruined by the Window?" Austin looked puzzled. "I've felt sure, of course, that he couldn't afford it, but at the moment, I confess I can't see how that would affect the situation exactly. I'll try to find out, but don't be too impulsive, Royle. You can't take on Colonel Willingdon's debts."

"Wouldn't dream of it, old man, but this Win-

dow . . . oh, well, I'll explain what I mean tonight."

Christopher made his escape rather hastily, knowing that the explanation was going to be difficult.

He was still ignorant of the value of the diamonds, and, on an impulse, when he had given the news of the inquest to Mary and Pat, he walked back to the local post-office and put through a long-distance call to Ponder and James.

The result was what he might have expected. Mr. Ponder, rather reproachful at such impatience on the part of his client, informed him that no reply had yet been received from the experts. Mr. Royle should have it the instant it came to hand.

What did it matter, after all? thought Christopher. Even if the diamonds were worth nothing at all, he would gladly pay for the Window, supposing Austin could be persuaded to let him do it in secret, if by such means they could persuade Patricia that the Colonel had not been ruined after all. Her peace of mind was the only thing that mattered.

ii

The solicitor had gone and Austin Winter was completely in the dark about the Window. Colonel Willingdon's will, made some years before, was of the briefest. The Manor and its contents were to be sold, his investments realized and his debts paid, all monies remaining to be sunk in an annuity for his darling wife. There were heavy mortgages on

the estate which the sale would little more than cover in all probability; his only investment was £500 in Government stock, all others having been realized from time to time to meet the interest on the mortgages. Mrs. Willingdon would have, Austin supposed, a small pension, but beyond that little or nothing, if the debts included the Window to her son.

The solicitor could not tell how this money had been raised and was convinced the old man had had no security to offer for it. He himself had not even heard of the Window and he was plainly sceptical that it could have cost anything approaching the sum Austin named.

"My dear sir, I knew my client's resources by heart and I knew his character. He was a man of the strictest rectitude and would never have borrowed such a sum, things being as they were with him, even supposing he could have found a fool to lend it," said the solicitor.

"I can only hope you are right," sighed Austin.

When the solicitor had gone he took the keys of the Colonel's desk which Doris had brought him, and opened it, thinking sadly of his old friend, lying cold upstairs. He hated this spying task, yet sooner or later he would have to know. Better get it over perhaps.

For years, in spite of failing health, the Colonel had paid all household bills himself, his wife being utterly incapable of keeping within the sum he could allow her. His desk, Austin found, was a model of

neatness, and his accounts in perfect order . . . paid bills, carefully filed in one pigeon-hole, unpaid in another, and his pass-book and cheque-book together in a third. The rector opened the pass-book and found a balance of £94.17.4; then he turned back the pages. On a date only three weeks away he found on the credit side note of a cheque for £1500, and on the page opposite a withdrawal of the same amount. It was true then. Somehow and from somebody he had borrowed this money.

Or had he sold something to raise it . . . some valuable piece of jewelry perhaps? The thought gave Austin hope for a moment until he remembered what Christopher had said. The Colonel had told Pat he was ruined by the Window.

With a sigh he reached for the unpaid bills, and underneath them found a letter from Sir Peter Duffield to Mrs. Willingdon, two months old.

"Dear Mrs. Willingdon," he read,

"I am delighted to advance you the loan for which you ask so charmingly and enclose my cheque herewith, glad to be of service to you.

"Please do not let the lack of security trouble you for a moment. Your husband is a man of honor and, as in the past, will return it to me in his own good time.

"With affectionate remembrances to you both,

"Yours very truly,

"PETER DUFFIELD."

Over the top of the letter Colonel Willingdon had written in a shaking hand: "Unpaid."

Was this the explanation? Austin was afraid so, though no sum was mentioned and the date of the letter was five weeks earlier than the entry in the pass-book. Mrs. Willingdon was at the bottom of it, of course. He might have known it. She had borrowed from Sir Peter Duffield, not only this but other sums, which the Colonel had paid back. Well, she had called it her Window. Hers indeed!

Doris came in to tell him that dinner was ready. They hadn't liked to ring the gong, she said; and Austin locked the desk and followed her, sad at heart. Food seemed utterly distasteful to him, but he played with it, while Doris watched him with solicitous eyes.

"I am afraid you must be dreadfully knocked up, Mr. Winter," she said. "You have had to bear the strain of everything. I have sent off all those letters and telegrams and I wish I could have helped you more, but Mrs. Willingdon seems to want me all the time, poor darling."

"You have been the greatest help, my dear," said Austin kindly. "I don't know what I should have done without you."

He meant it. In that distracted household, she had been the one person to whom he could turn for help or information, though she had not once been in his presence for five minutes that Mrs. Willingdon had not summoned her away.

Doris, flushing under his praise, exclaimed impulsively:

"I'd like to tell you what we mean to do. She doesn't feel she can bear to stay at Dorne any longer, so she is going to sell the Manor and come and live in town with me. I'm . . . I'm most awfully happy about it."

Austin closed his lips hard, nauseated beyond expression. She could sit up there, planning her life anew, that old woman, with the man who had loved her beyond reason, perhaps even beyond honor, not yet in his grave.

"Don't you think it is a splendid idea?" asked Doris, wistfully.

"I think it would be a very heavy responsibility for you, Miss Duffield, and I think you should give the matter careful consideration and not let your kind heart carry you away." Austin's voice grew stern. "The Manor will be sold, it is true. Colonel Willingdon's will instructs us to that effect and Mrs. Willingdon has no disposition in the matter. Her income will, I fear, be small, and she is an elderly lady who can be very exacting. You are young and your life is before you. Frankly, if you will allow me to say so, I don't think you should undertake it."

"You don't understand," cried Doris. "I love her and she is fond of me. It wouldn't matter if she hadn't a penny. My allowance is absurdly large and I haven't a responsibility in the world. I'm lonely and it would be the greatest joy to me to

have somebody I cared for to fuss over and look after."

"You think your father will approve of such an arrangement?" asked Austin.

"He won't care," she said, with sudden bitterness. "I never see my father. I'm not complaining, Mr. Winter. He likes Monte Carlo and I hate living abroad. We . . . we don't understand each other very well. It isn't his fault. It's just . . . unfortunate."

Austin was filled with pity for her. Though Sir Peter was the patron of the living at Dorne, the rector's knowledge of him was slight, but the Colonel, he knew, had detested the other man. And she, poor child, he supposed, would do this thing whatever they might say. She would sacrifice herself to the old woman and believe she was happy in the privilege. Mrs. Willingdon would still have her stage and take the center of it as a right.

"By the way, Miss Duffield," he said, after a moment, "among Colonel Willingdon's papers I have found a memorandum relating to some money lent to his wife by your father. I speak in confidence, of course. Do you perhaps know anything about it?"

"Father lent her £1500 quite lately," nodded Doris, "for the Window."

"I see."

"The . . . the Colonel was dreadfully angry about it," blurted Doris. "He wanted to return it, but at last the poor darling was so ill that he gave

in. He was always very queer about money, she says."

"It is necessary to be queer about money when we haven't got it," said the rector grimly.

Doris looked up in alarm.

"She has always told me he had plenty. I'm sure she thought so," she said eagerly. "But she said that he was so careful and so dreadfully business-like."

"The Colonel was more than business-like. He was an upright man, Miss Duffield, and Mrs. Willingdon perhaps, like many ladies of her generation, did not understand the value of money. In the years I have known him he was certainly never a wealthy man. The condition of the estate must have suggested that to you."

"I thought it was just because he was ill," said Doris, "and could no longer attend to things. It was silly of me, I suppose. Is . . . is it very bad? My father wrote to me and asked whether it was all right, when Mrs. Willingdon appealed to him about the Window, and I said yes. I. . . ."

Austin hedged, attempting a smile to reassure her.

"Oh, no doubt it will be all right," he said. "The Colonel's will directs that his debts shall be paid first of all, and I am just endeavoring to get some idea of where we stand. I am very much obliged to you for this information, my dear. £1500, you say? I must make a note of that. You will regard this as a confidence, I know. There is no occasion to

trouble Mrs. Willingdon with these matters until after the reading of the Will."

"Of course," said Doris. "I won't breathe a word."

iii

Dinner was over and Doris had returned to Mrs. Willingdon.

For an hour Austin had worked, or tried to do so in the dreary drawing room, but he could not concentrate and at last he decided to go home. He called a servant, left a message for Miss Duffield that he would be with her early in the morning, and with a heavy heart returned to the Rectory.

He could not trust himself to go to Woden after all, for Patricia's quick eyes would see his distress, and that at all costs he wanted to avoid. She, poor child, had had enough to bear.

Only a week ago he had begged her not to blame Mrs. Willingdon too much. Phrases again, and how easy they were, and meaningless after all. He was filled with self-contempt. Pity and understanding were the two qualities demanded of his office and he knew he had neither for this old woman who had sent an upright man to ruin and death. And all these years, while she had slandered that splendid girl, he had sat silent, he had held his hand, and talked of not being hard upon her!

CHAPTER XXI

i

CHRISTOPHER strolled towards Dorne at nine o'clock, in the hope of meeting Austin, and looking in at the Rectory, found him sitting alone in the study, doing nothing.

"I didn't come over for you," said Austin. "I should have been such poor company."

"My dear chap, you do look done. I was afraid you might be. . . . Things pretty bad then?"

The other man said in a hard voice:

"Mrs. Willingdon borrowed the money for the Window from Sir Peter Duffield, without her husband's knowledge. Miss Duffield tells me he wanted to return it but she made herself so ill that he gave in. It is very doubtful that the estate will be able to pay more than a fraction of it."

"That is what he meant then," considered Christopher. "He told Pat he was ruined but she had her Window, with the real memorial to their son growing up before their eyes."

"God forgive me, I'm to blame for this," said Austin. "I've seen the boy's growing likeness to his father for more than a year. I should have asked for Pat's confidence frankly and persuaded her to tell the Willingdons, or at least let her take Michael away. The responsibility is wholly mine."

"She did tell them, old fellow. She told Mrs. Willingdon at the start and was turned out of the house for her pains. She had always thought the Colonel knew."

"WHAT?" Austin Winter sat up. "That vile woman. . . ."

"I'll admit she has seemed more than vile to me," said Christopher, "but Pat sees further than that. She sees she was afraid, and that does make the old witch faintly human. Pat is so fair. She says you made her realize that Mrs. Willingdon was just a spoiled beauty so used to admiration she couldn't do without it, and now she knows she was a frightened beauty and those old slanders just a desperate effort to convince herself. God! what a contrast between those two women, Winter, sane and insane . . . for it is a sort of insanity, this egomania. She'll never realize the harm she's done. I'll bet she'd be amazed if you hinted at it. As for Pat, I know this trouble will pass. She is incapable of sentimentality, but she does fret a bit about the poor old Colonel and the Window, and hang it all, I'm not afraid of being sentimental on her behalf. You see, she loved this boy. We can't let the debt for the Window go unpaid."

"You are doing enough already," protested Austin. "Think of Michael."

"I am thinking of the little chap. Young Willingdon was his father, and the old Colonel, if I'm any judge, gave the boy the best qualities he has. This is not my money that I want you to take for

the Window. It is some I more or less hold in trust for a suitable purpose. Call it Michael's, if you like, because I had intended the youngster to have it, until this matter cropped up. But Michael is all right. He is my job now and I'd much rather have it like that."

Christopher came and sat on the table at the rector's side, fingering his pipe.

"I can't give you all the story, because it isn't mine to give, old man, but I'll tell you what I can," he said. "A poor chap died of fever in my camp in Africa not many weeks ago, and gave this money into my hands. Bit of a ne'er-do-well, they called him, but that's merely a label and like most labels probably wrong. He'd been the victim to a large extent, of selfishness and vanity, just as the poor old Colonel was. His bit of luck came too late to put things right for him; it's too late for the Colonel also in a sense, but it can at least save a fine chap's memory from reproach. I'm going to give you a cheque to-night, and as the executor, when the moment comes for settling up, you can just shove the money across to Duffield as part of the estate, and nobody will be any the wiser.

"They're out of it, those two, sleeping soundly, or, if there's anything in that heaven of yours, perhaps they've met and had a laugh together over what fools we mortals be. Think of it as Michael's Window, if you like. He'd love to give you a Window to that wonderful father of his. Or if you must be as unbelieving as you look, kid yourself I

have given you a rather decent Window for your church because it needed one. Nice sort of parson, you are, to have a fellow in your parish for a week and never ask him for a contribution."

Austin Winter looked up at his visitor at last, and for the first time, he smiled.

"Very well, you thundering liar, write your cheque," he said.

ii

They walked over to Woden after all, and seeing lights still burning, turned in to the drive.

Patricia and Mary Winter were sitting as Christopher had left them in the garden, and Austin fell into a chair at the girl's side, and gently took her hand.

"Don't fret for him, my dear," he said, as once he had said of Terry Willingdon.

"Oh, Austin, I know he's better off. He's out of it, but it's the Window. Did it really ruin him?"

"Ruin is a comparative term, Pat. He was a very upright man, and perhaps it seemed like ruin because his wife had borrowed this money which it might be difficult to repay. Try to think of him as ill and old and over-anxious, for it is perfectly all right, my dear. It will be paid. The money's there."

She sat silent for a moment and then she said a curious thing.

"I hope he knows."

Had she once more seen further than they

guessed? Austin thought so, but he knew that she would never say. She would keep her secret with a smile and she would be happy again.

iii

Christopher Royle, with a secret of his own to keep, thought of it when, on the morning of the Colonel's funeral, he came out of the Rectory and saw the open grave.

Mary was staying on at Woden and he had spent the night at the Rectory with Austin, who was still tied by day to Mrs. Willingdon's affairs.

The Colonel's grave was lined with flowers. They had seen sent over from Highways, a last thought for him of "that girl," who little guessed how he would have hated it.

Christopher went into the churchyard, thinking of the fine old man he had known for a brief moment, and of that poor chap, his son. This was the real end of Terry Willingdon's story . . . rather a suitable end, Christopher thought it, his little fortune, found too late, paying a debt of honor in his father's name.

"Squares things somehow," said Christopher to himself.

He turned into the church and looked at the Window.

The curtain had been taken down, for there would be no formal Dedication now. It was as though Fate had planned this grim jest and, at the last moment, held her hand.

The morning sunlight streamed down in flashes of scarlet and gold and blue through the old, lovely glass, where St. George without the dragon, or whoever he might be, stood triumphant. Old English letters on a brass tablet below set out the legend of a hero

IN MEMORY OF
CAPTAIN GEORGE TERENCE
WILLINGDON, M.C., D.S.O.

Only son of Colonel and Mrs. Willingdon,
of Dorne Manor,
Who gave his life in the Great War,
11 November, 1918.
Aged 21 years.

"Well, it's your Window, whatever you did or didn't do," said Christopher. "You've paid for it. Now laugh. She'd never have loved a chap without a sense of humor."

He thought of Pat.

He'd loved her too, this fellow, surely, carrying her letter about the world?

Christopher took the letter out of his pocket and read it through for the last time. He lit a match and one by one saw her words blacken and disappear and fall in ashes on the floor.

Then, half satirically, as one youngster to another, in the days of War, he saluted.

"It's all right, old man," said Christopher Royle to the shade of Terry Willingdon. "I won't tell."